

PASTORAL CARE TO NON-TRADITIONAL
FAMILIES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST
CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

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by
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The context is Ebenezer Baptist Church in Boston, Massachusetts. The problem is the church experiences difficulty ministering to families because it possesses an antiquated understanding of what constitutes a family. If leadership within the context participate in a symposium on the dynamics of family in the 21st century, then they will be equipped to come away with skills that will help them minister to the needs of unique families. The project was conducted over six weeks. Data collection utilized pre and post-project questionnaires, demographic information, focused journaling, interviews, and group discussions. Data analysis concluded that the project was successful.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank our God who keeps us every day. I thank God for using this incredible academic pursuit of this doctoral degree program to allow me to grow and become renewed. This journey of aiming to achieve this terminal degree of the Doctor of Ministry did not come without its intersecting life challenges. However, I want to thank my mentors, Dr. McReynolds and Dr. Coleman, who were incredible mentors and were always spiritually and academically supportive, challenging, and engaging. Sometimes life hit me hard during these six semesters, and I thought I would need to exit the program, but they encouraged me to be steadfast and consistent to get through these semesters. They were open to candid dialogue about my doctoral project. I also want to thank Dr. Abraham for his early assistance in my research. My paper could not have achieved its final form without the guidance and direction of a solid editor in Dr. Kenneth Cummings.

The pastoral care focus group peers have offered heartfelt soul care, and we have had good fellowship and conversations within this group. The spiritual autobiography journey was a tough one and learning how to incorporate becoming more open and vulnerable has been a pain point to overcome, and a lesson learned from my mentor.

I also want to acknowledge my childhood pastor for twenty years, Bishop Warren M. Brown of the Columbus Ave AME Zion Church in Boston and his wife Aurelia Brown, who were stabilizing Christian examples of what good Christian conduct should

be. Their rigorous academic success and pursuit brought me up in the ways of the Lord. I would not have become who I am today without them. I must note these additional ministers and persons who contributed to my Christian walk throughout my life: Sis. Ruth, Ms. Minnie B. Clark, Rev. Nathaniel K. Perry, Rev. Spurgeon L. East, Rev. Dr. Lowell M. McCown, and Rev. Dr. Ronald K. Hill.

I thank the churches I have been blessed to pastor because each membership taught me spiritual lessons. I thank my current church family for their love and support during this time. Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for all their support as I pursued this doctoral degree.

DEDICATION

This work and research are dedicated to my mother, father, grandparents, half-brother, and daughter. My maternal grandmother, Ruby Evans, whose nickname was “Mom Mom,” was my dedicated support system, spiritual rock, and life example. I mourn her loss every day. I truly thank God for her because without her, I would not have developed into the person I am today. I am thankful to her for her central involvement and influence. We have all had to navigate this colorful world within a non-traditional family structure. Within our family, we have those who live lifestyles differently. I also dedicate this project to my only daughter, Saige Thompson, as an example of seizing the opportunities in life to pursue your dreams and achieve your goals, no matter what you aspire to do. It is possible even through life’s hardships. This work ensures space for everyone in the Body of Christ. This project ensures that my church (Ebenezer Baptist Church of Boston) and other churches offer a more compassionate, loving, supportive, and welcoming ministry, regardless of presuppositions or bias.

I also dedicate this doctoral project to my mother, a great woman of God. I have been standing beside her, watching her, as she has fought various life battles. As I write this dedication, I pray for her because she is in the fight of her life for cancer, and I cannot help her like I want to or ease her sickness and pain, but only God can. I thank her for doing a job well done as a single divorced parent trying to raise her family the best she could. In my earlier years, I often challenged my mother, as I did not fully understand

everything about life. Still, I have come to respect and admire her strength and unwavering love for my success, protection, and our family.

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ABBREVIATIONS

FST	Family System Theory
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

I always wanted to be someone better the next day than I was the day before.

—Sydney Poitier, Brainyquotes.com

INTRODUCTION

This doctoral thesis and project researched how to understand and minister effectively with spiritual skills to non-traditional families in the 21st century. Family structures have evolved and changed drastically in the modern era. I am familiar with and have a history of being raised in a non-traditional upbringing. My mother, a young, divorced parent, raised me. My life shifted from a traditional (nuclear) home to a non-traditional home with a stepfather, and eventually, I had a half-brother born after me. There were missing emotional issues such as acceptance, fitting in, and needing an extended, welcoming, and supportive environment through the church ministry. My grandparents were tremendous helpers to my mother in rearing me.

In light of my passion in life and ministry, I too see in the life of the church where I serve many different configurations of families. It seems as if traditional families that are members or are joining the church seem to have a smoother process of acceptance and affiliation wherein the non-traditional families – many times – feel as if they are outsiders and that the ministries do not cater to them. As a result, I have chosen this project “Pastoral Care to Non-Traditional Families in the Twenty-First Century.”

Chapter one, Ministry Focus, deals aspects of my life story that includes childhood years, adult years that include places where I have studied, and my present journey. This chapter also speaks to my call to faith, ordination, and various places where

I have served. My gifts for ministry and passion are also examined in light of my context that led to this idea of “pastoral care to non-traditional families.”

In Chapter two, Biblical Foundations, analyzes the passage of 1 Samuel 3:1-19, which provides valuable insights into pastoral care for non-traditional families. This passage asserts the notion of revelation when God selects specific individuals to carry out essential assignments in His kingdom. The narrative of Samuel tells us that Samuel, who served under Eli’s direction in the temple, gives us the biblical picturesque of inclusion rather than rejection, dejection, and exclusion. The Bible tells us that Hannah gave Samuel away for the priest Eli to raise Him in the temple and demonstrate how to discern God’s voice. A biblical perspective raises the awareness of church leaders to be spiritually sensitive toward the un-commonality of others while discerning the calling of God.

Chapter three, Historical Foundations, explores the impact of slavery and the Great Migration on African American family structures. This analysis demonstrates that non-traditional families have been around for a while, contrary to conventional wisdom. These two periods in the history of the United States gave valuable lessons in pastoral care for African American families, and they showed remarkable tenacity and versatility in withstanding these challenging times. By gaining a historical view of family dynamics, the study supports the current 21st-century church leaders with proper tools for refocusing the meaning of “family.”

Chapter four, Theological Foundations, examines the integration of practical theology into pastoral care for non-traditional families. Incorporating practical theology into family ministry is critical to the project’s assumption in supporting trauma care,

inclusion, spirituality, and love like Christ. Through this theological study, the focus deduces that pastors should listen to God's direction, embrace diversity, and have compassion for those away from home whom they minister to. It brings the wisdom, compassion, and cultural humility necessary to face the challenges that affect family ministry, such as alterations in family forms, economic disparities, and other cultures.

Chapter five, *Interdisciplinary Foundations*, explores pastoral care for non-traditional families through the lens of Family Systems Theory within a church context. This approach gives information on the relationships between family members, patterns of interaction, and system aspects that influence the family. It, therefore, makes families and the church's role in maintaining healthy relationships and the total development of its members more straightforward to understand through concepts such as differentiation of self, emotional fusion, and multi-generational transmission. This allows having a multi-disciplinary approach to the model in such a way that an effective mechanism of pastoral care that combines psychology and spiritual aspects can be developed. It indicates that ministry to non-traditional families demands an appreciation of multi-faceted family patterns and the ability to meet their spiritual and psychosocial needs.

Chapter six, *Project Analysis*, deals with how the project was created, designed, and implemented. Information is given on the stakeholders in this project — context associates and professional associates. This chapter lays out the timeframe of the project, the various topics covered each week, and the resources persons who gave leadership. This chapter also lays out the methodology for evaluating this process along with the data gathering and analysis. Lastly, it gives a summary of learning and addresses the veracity of this project for positive and future use.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

I was raised in a family filled with tremendous faith. In my view, my grandparents on the maternal side of my family were positive models of faith. My mother and grandparents were my spiritual foundation conduit and support system. My family disciplined us to be good citizens, value our African American heritage, appreciate cultural diversity, maintain specific moral values, and attend Sunday school and church. The mandate from my family was to participate in church and Sunday school, and this was not an option but part of our culture and the fabric of our upbringing.

Based on recent observations as a local pastor, I have noticed the dynamic shifts from traditional families attending church to non-traditional families. Non-traditional families appear to be the norm now. I was called to the gospel ministry at fifteen and saved at twelve years old. I grew up in a non-traditional family structure. I was primarily raised with my mother, step-father, half-brother, and a robust grandparent support system. My feelings and emotions were constantly challenged when I identified others with the same biological mother and father in the home. Most of my upbringing did not include a nuclear family structure with both biological parents. My life began as a nuclear family and then shifted from a nuclear family to a blended and non-traditional family. In

our current culture, the traditional nuclear family is declining. Only 62% of children live with two married parents which is an all-time low.¹

At the outset of this writing, I thought that upholding the biblical marriage covenant between a man and a woman is vital. It is essential to uplift and maintain two biological parents, mother and father, and children raised by the same when possible. In our current church context, there is often a void within church ministries for support services not provided for non-traditional family structures. Usually, fear exists within the relational aspects of non-traditional family structures. “Just below the surface in nearly every new non-traditional family relationship lies a hidden question: Do you really love me, and can I trust you? What overcomes that fear is persistent faithful love.”² The Bible speaks to various non-traditional family situations whereby God was at work. This paper will explore how my spiritual autobiography and context have intertwined.

My present context supports the idea of pastoral care and support for non-traditional families. My church emphasizes the covenant between both biological parents — what we call the nuclear family. The nuclear family was honored and created by God as we see Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. However, the beginning of the human nuclear family did not prevent God from using others from non-traditional family structures for His benefit and glory. My interest is to show individuals who are reared in non-traditional families that their life has biblical meaning, hope, and purpose. Through

¹ Mona Bapat, “Exploring Nontraditional Family Structures,” Love To Know, June 30, 2021, <https://www.lovetoknow.com/life/diversity-inclusion/exploring-nontraditional-family-structures>.

² Gary D. Chapman and Ron L. Deal, *Building Love Together in Blended Families: The 5 Love Languages and Becoming Stepfamily Smart* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2020), 93.

this exploration project concerning these non-traditional families, I want to demonstrate that the Bible teaches us our purpose and meaning. The psalmist declares, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works” (139:13-14, ESV).

It often appears that many leaders in the church only advocate for and lift the traditional family as God’s family; moreover, I feel that we do not adequately teach, care, and minister to all the various family models within the church body without judgment. People who grew up in these non-traditional models need to know that God loves them, they have self-worth, and God respects them. The church should be a safe space regardless of a person’s family background. The church should exhibit the presence of God within the culture where everyone can join in worship, praise, and participate in programs and activities. Plenty of ministry leaders within the church do not pass the traditional family test, but they are used weekly to edify His people.

Context

The church I pastor is located in a historic section of Boston called the South End. The Ebenezer Baptist Church building was built in 1860 and, over the years, has gone through many renovations and reconfigurations. Shortly after the close of the Civil War, on September 15, 1847, a ship carrying sixty-six men, women, and children docked at Long Wharf in Boston. This group of formerly enslaved people led by Peter Randolph was from the Brandon Plantation in Prince George County, Virginia. The journey north to freedom took place according to the promise and departure order issued in the will of their former enslaver, Carter H. Edlow. A member of Boston’s-Anti-Slavery Society, led

by William Lloyd Garrison, met the newcomers and welcomed them by securing lodgings and work to enable them to support themselves. The group settled in the South End on Ottaway Court, near the Holy Cross Cathedral.³

This group of free slaves on the ship that arrived in Boston became the seed of the church. Many group songs and prayer services began in Martha Jones' kitchen.⁴ These services were led by men known as exhorters. Later, in a hall at 1060 Washington Street, the children gathered for Sunday School in the evenings, and the adults learned reading, writing, and good citizenship. The "kitchen prayer services became Sunday evening preaching services with Rev. Randolph as the first pastor and founder. Ebenezer Baptist Church of Boston was incepted and officially established in October 1871.

Extensive revival services were held during the early years of the church fellowship. These revival services spawned rapid growth of the congregation. These events prompted the calling together of a council to organize a church consisting of Dr. A. J. Gordon of Clarendon Street Baptist Church, Dr. George Lorimer of the First Baptist Church (located at the corner of Rutland Square and Shawmut Avenue), and Dr. Seymour of the Ruggles Street Baptist Church as moderators. This coordination of existing churches helped to organize Ebenezer Baptist Church and facilitate its foundation in 1871.

A predominantly African-American community surrounded Ebenezer Baptist Church of Boston for many years. There have been tremendous shifts in the community with large numbers of Black Bostonians relocating from the district and socioeconomic

³ Ebenezer Baptist Church, Inc., "Boston - Our Story," <https://ebenezerbcboston.org/our-story>.

⁴ Ebenezer Baptist Church, Inc., "Boston - Our Story," <https://ebenezerbcboston.org/our-story>.

shifts resulting from gentrification. Ebenezer Baptist Church of Boston predates these shifts but has been impacted by the changes in the community surrounding the church. The neighborhood around the church now has a white majority with white people accounting for 64% of the population.⁵ The average income of the church is significantly different from that of the community it surrounds. Today, the congregation mainly comprises seniors on a fixed income. The other socioeconomic group is the working class. Church membership has declined recently due to an aging community, death, and ministry relevance. There has also been a decline in youth and young adult members. As a ministry, we are eager to implement the tools to turn these areas around.

Boston Demographics

Boston is the largest city in Massachusetts and holds the state seat of Suffolk County. The city is on the eastern side of Massachusetts state and lies on Massachusetts Bay. Boston was founded in 1630 following the settlement of Reverend William Blackstone and other Puritans, and it was later upgraded to a city in 1822.⁶ The city is known for its historical and memorial buildings alongside its historical associations with the English settlers in the Americas. This year, Boston is estimated to have a population of 693,062, making it the most populous city in Massachusetts and the 23rd most populated city in the US. The population of Boston is estimated to grow at a rate of 0.84% annually. Since the 2020 census, the city recorded a population of 675, 647.

⁵ US Census Bureau, “QuickFacts Boston city, Massachusetts,” 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/bostoncitymassachusetts/RHI625221#RHI625221>.

⁶ World Population Review, “Boston, Massachusetts population 2023,” <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/boston-ma-population>.

Boston's population has grown by 2.58%.⁷ Boston city rests on ninety square miles with a population density of 14,338 per square mile. Today, Boston hosts sixty-eight universities and colleges. Besides, Boston is a critical financial and industrial center and one of the cities with the finest ports in the world. Boston is known as one of the prestigious and oldest cities to host the annual World Marathon, attracting about 25,000 athletes and over one million spectators.

Race

Boston is a city of different ethnicities and races; however, the city is predominantly white. Whites account for 52.11% of Boston's population. African Americans, including people of sub-Saharan African, Nigerian, Korean, and Caribbean origin, account for 24.2%. Boston is also home to Asians, who account for 9.82% of the city's population.⁸ Some significant Asian tribes in Boston include the Indians, the Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese, among other Asian nationalities. People identified as a combination of two or more races account for 7.25%, while other race accounts for 6.26% of Boston's population.⁹ The Native Americans represent 0.31% of the population, while the Pacific Islanders or the Native Hawaiians represent 0.05%. Thus, Boston has a diversified racial representation, although whites are predominant. Like other cities in the south, Boston is considered as one of the racially segregated cities

⁷ US Census Bureau, "QuickFacts Boston city, Massachusetts," 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/bostoncitymassachusetts/RHI625221#RHI625221>.

⁸ World Population Review, "Boston, Massachusetts population 2023," 2023, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/boston-ma-population>.

⁹ World Population Review, "Boston, Massachusetts population 2023," <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/boston-ma-population>.

as depicted by inequalities among these populations in various social and economic sectors such as education, health, and income levels. The Latinos and African Americans continue to face persistent health inequalities compared to their white counterparts in the city, depicting why their population is low compared to that of the whites.

Age

The age demographics of Boston indicate that the city's population mainly consists of young people with a majority of them aged between twenty and thirty years. Residents aged between zero and nine years represent 8% of the city's population, while those between twenty and twenty-nine years represent 22%.¹⁰ The seniors, aged between seventy and seventy-nine years, and those above eighty years, represent 5% and 3% of Boston's population, respectively. Thus, a large percentage of the people in Boston are part of the younger generation with a median age of thirty-three. One of the possible explanations for the predominantly younger population in the city of Boston is based on the higher birth rate in the community. Boston has a birthrate of 3.5 %, representing most of the population in the productive age.¹¹ This rate depicts a lower old-age dependency ratio of 16.3 compared to children at 21.7.¹² Therefore, the young population is likely to promote economic and social growth in the city, thus improving services to support the

¹⁰ World Population Review, "Boston, Massachusetts population 2023," <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/boston-ma-population>.

¹¹ Census Reporter, "Boston, MA," 2021, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US2507000-boston-ma/>.

¹² World Population Review, "Boston, Massachusetts population 2023," <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/boston-ma-population>.

growing population. The population of Boston is also expected to continue growing as a significant percentage of its population is in their productive fertility age.

Educational Levels

The city of Boston is an educational hub. The city hosts about sixty-eight colleges and universities. As such, there is easy access to education, especially in higher institutions of learning, thus supporting the needs of the labor market. 27.84% of Bostonians above twenty-five years have attained a bachelor's degree, while 23.5% have attained a graduate degree.¹³ 4.61% have an associate degree, while 13.02% have pursued some college courses. High school graduates account for 18.9% of the population, while those who have attained the 9th to the 12th grade represent 5.3%.¹⁴ Only 6.77% of the people in Boston above twenty-five years have achieved less than the 9th-grade certificate. However, educational disparities are more pronounced among different ethnicities regarding high school certificates and those with bachelor's degrees, as depicted by the white majority and other ethnic communities. For example, 168,057 whites have attained bachelor's degrees, against 25,831 black Americans, 388 Native Americans, and 111 Pacific Islanders.¹⁵ These educational attainment rates depict significant educational disparities in Boston, which denies other ethnicities opportunities of having similar educational attainment to the whites. These disparities, in turn,

¹³ World Population Review, "Boston, Massachusetts population 2023," <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/boston-ma-population>.

¹⁴ World Population Review, "Boston, Massachusetts population 2023," <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/boston-ma-population>.

¹⁵ World Population Review, "Boston, Massachusetts population 2023," <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/boston-ma-population>.

negatively affect the income rates, thus widening the city's social-economic disparities among different ethnicities.

Household Income Levels

The city of Boston has a median household income of \$81,744 over a year with a mean annual income of \$120,939.¹⁶ The median income is based on 271,950 households in the city, comprising an average number of people. The family household accounts for 47.12%, while the non-family household represents 52.88%.¹⁷ The chart below depicts the income levels in the city of Boston.

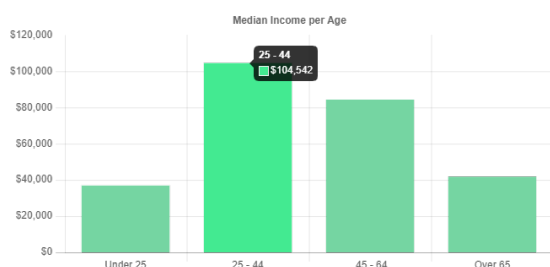


Chart 1: Boston's Median Income per Age

From the chart above, residents of Boston aged between twenty-five years and forty-four years earn an average of \$104,542, which makes up the largest majority of the population, while those aged between forty-five and sixty-four years earn a median income of \$84,326.¹⁸ However, those below the age of twenty-five years earn an average of \$36,900, while those aged sixty-five and above earn \$41,833. These income levels in

¹⁶ Point2 Homes, "Boston demographics," 2023, <https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/MA/Boston-Demographics.html>.

¹⁷ Point2 Homes, "Boston demographics," 2023, <https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/MA/Boston-Demographics.html>.

¹⁸ Point2 Homes, "Boston demographics," 2023, <https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/MA/Boston-Demographics.html>.

Boston depict why the dependency ratio for senior citizens is lower compared to the dependence ratio of those below twenty-five years.

The South End of Boston, where Ebenezer Baptist Church is located, lies south of the Back Bay, southwest of the Bay village, north of Dorchester, northeast of Roxbury, and northwest of South Boston. This neighborhood was built between 1830 and 1870 using a tidal marsh and was part of a larger project to fill the Boston bays. Due to a lack of advanced technology, the South End was constructed using submerged timbers that served as the foundation for most South End buildings.¹⁹ Today, the South End is characterized by railroads covering the southwest corridor, with most neighborhood streets named after towns and cities initially served by the railroads, including Wareham, Chatham, and Greenwich.

This neighborhood has a population of 25,101. Females constitute 50.98% of the population, while males constitute 49.02%.²⁰ The median age of the people of the South End is 33.7, suggesting that a more significant percentage of the population in this neighborhood is young. About 68.03% of the citizens in this area are Americans, while only 21.34% are non-Americans. Whites are the predominant race in this neighborhood accounting for 64% of the population. Other races include Asians, African Americans, and Hispanics, accounting for 12%, 9%, and 7% of the population respectively. Furthermore, neighborhood's population, people of two or more races, account for 5%, American Indians or Alaska Natives account for 1%, and Pacific Islanders and Hawaiians account for 1%, while other races account for 1%.

¹⁹ Blackstone Franklin, "The south end," 2021, <http://www.blackstonefranklin.org/southend>.

²⁰ Point2 Homes, "South End Boston Demographics," 2023, <https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/MA/Boston/South-End-Boston-Demographics.html>.

The South End comprises 12,223 households of up to two members per household. Unlike other parts of Boston, in the South End, family households represent 36.12% of all households, while non-family establishments account for 63.88%.²¹ These demographics show that many households in the South End consist of young people who have yet to form families. Only 13.37% of households in the South End include children, compared to 86.63% with no children. The average household income is \$141,172, while the median annual income is \$71,096. People aged Twenty-five to forty-five are the highest earners, with an average income of \$130,487, while those between forty-five and sixty-five receive a median income of \$49,060.²² Those above sixty-five earn an average of \$27,986, while those below 25 earn \$46,224.

These findings above substantiate the makeup of the surrounding community, which correlates to the lack of growth in what was known as the traditional black family church, where families used to live nearby. This ministry must evolve by counseling and continuing through multiple spiritual and clinical support measures. The church should provide services that meet the existing membership and potential members by teaching biblical Jesus Christ principles to those who want to share Christ to strengthen non-traditional families.

Many church members currently come from a diverse community and non-traditional families. They must be included in the Body of Christ and ministered to effectively without prejudice while working out their spiritual issues. Our recent church

²¹ Point2 Homes, "South End Boston Demographics," 2023, <https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/MA/Boston/South-End-Boston-Demographics.html>.

²² Point2 Homes, "South End Boston Demographics," 2023, <https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/MA/Boston/South-End-Boston-Demographics.html>.

file and survey indicate that out of 150 members, over 105 are retired, and the rest are working. Our membership is primarily African American, with a percentage of Latinos, whites, and other mixed ethnicities. There is a significant gap within the church between working families, retirees, and traditional and non-traditional families. If more non-traditional families were biblically informed about their place in God, they would feel more secure in Jesus Christ church, thus creating more retention.

The Ebenezer Baptist Church of Boston has a long history of providing social services that have declined. These services have included multiple programs for the community such as the AA program, senior (elder) services, educational programs, Boy Scouts, and other programs, along with community outreach. I want to see our church more involved in these program areas again. In addition, due to the demographic shifts and the congregation being impacted by the local community, I think it is essential for the church to develop and educate non-traditional families on their biblical description and understanding of God's family.

I have been the pastor of this congregation for fifteen years and in pastoral ministry for twenty-two years. I have observed throughout the ministry that if we could develop a model for non-traditional families to be spiritually ministered to from the onset of joining our church to being active members, our families would be more robust. This congregation is aging and needs immediate action to remedy this situation. In part, the congregation has chosen to ignore the changing family systems that must be ministered to. I am passionate about changing the contours of these family dynamics based on my academic background and personal life experience with growing up in a non-traditional home.

I want to provide families with the tools necessary to enhance their quality of life by making them feel more included as a part of the family of God. Where is the church today on these relevant issues? We have single parents in the church; we have step-parent families; we have gay and lesbian partners in the church; we have foster care families; we have teenage parents; and we have adopted families. We frequently do not discuss the realities and struggles of many non-traditional families because of people's discomfort with talking about them. So often, the support groups are not there for them, and educational programs, along with clinical help, are needed from the church. The church needs classes to educate leaders and provide them with the tools to equip leaders to create a welcoming environment to strengthen the church's dynamic in the 21st-century ministry context. We need to educate our leaders regarding the biblical models of families, biblical love, legalities, developing self-esteem with a non-traditional family, parenting communication, and understanding the composition of the non-traditional family and clinical psychology as well.

Ministry Journey

My ministry began at fifteen when I accepted my call and was licensed to preach. I was ordained at age eighteen by Bishop Alfred G. Dunston of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church, who said it was better to have me covered as I began my early ministry and went off to college. The Lord moved upon me early in life, and I felt the "urging sense of call." I was always fascinated by anything about God and church. I was raised as a Methodist in the AMEZ Church. The church disciplines gave me a spiritual and holistic life foundation. During my mid 20's, I was persuaded by the

Holy Spirit to explore a different move of God in my life. I was going through adult questions concerning my identity and faith life while being shaped as a young adult and enrolling in college. Like many young adults, I was searching and curious after being reared up in the church all my life, and I left the church for a short while, but God kept His hand on me while I was searching.

My Methodist denomination, while spiritual in its overall organizational structure, still had a tremendous political aspect. The denomination appeared to have a sub-culture and tradition that competed with my hunger and desire for a fresh anointing. As a result, I was led to a new spiritual transformation and growth within the Baptist faith, and I have remained with this faith fellowship ever since.

I was forcibly raised in the church; ironically, the church ended up being the greatest blessing in my life. I experienced a life focused by spiritual people who always surrounded me at every junction. Years ago, I also heard a powerful sermon that my pastor preached, “When God Speaks,” and it moved me to become saved that day. This message was God trying to reach me when I was experiencing tremendous difficulties within my non-traditional family situation. My parents were divorced and remarried almost simultaneously. My mother was awarded physical custody, and I was reared with a stepfather. This situation was not pleasant. I witnessed as a child a lot of abuse toward my mother by my stepfather. It was physical and verbal juxtaposed with extensive drinking by my stepfather. I looked to the church for support; unfortunately, it appeared it was only structured for supporting traditional family models. There was a void for non-traditional families to seek assistance and support. The nuclear family was always uplifted. I sent a note to my pastor one day, and he acknowledged my letter and began

ministering to me one-on-one about my life situation. My maternal grandmother (mom mom) was also a tremendous support system and a tower of strength, making the most impact in my developmental years. I would not be who I am without her as I write this synergy paper.

As a young adult, I have been married and divorced; subsequently, I have experienced the church's displeasure and behaviors toward singleness and divorced people. I have observed where the church does not consider, serve, or treat the restoration of people who fall outside the traditional family makeup. I have been a step-father serving as an active pastor and have experienced these issues firsthand. These pending non-traditional family structures that individuals experience include divorce, step-parenting, step-children, single parenting, teenage parents, surrogate parents, adoption, and etc. This can sometimes leave individuals with side effects of broken and shattered emotions. As a result, we need the church to provide spiritual support, clinical support, individual counseling, family intervention, psychological support, peer support groups, and biblical reference of support that affirms God in these situations.

My academic background includes a Bachelor of Science in Health Education from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and a Master of Ministry Degree from Anderson University, Anderson in South Carolina. I also serve as the Protestant Chaplain of the City of Boston Fire Department. These academic degrees, pastoral experiences, and life experiences have prepared me to minister effectively to these various family dynamics within the church.

Professionally, I have worked in the insurance industry for corporate America for many years. The insurance experience gave me excellent time management, self-starting

skills, organization, budgeting, decision-making, documentation, and computer skills, complementing my pastoral ministry skill set. I have been a bi-vocational pastor for over twenty-two years until this past year when the Lord moved upon me to strengthen my ministry by devoting my entire life to solely kingdom building. I have been blessed to serve as the pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church of Boston for more than sixteen years. The church where I serve has been in a place of transition for a few years since the onset of the pandemic. The church edifice has deteriorated due to the age of the building. In addition, the church is situated in a gentrification zone. This is a traditional church with many conventional spiritual norms. The church ministry and leadership need vision, good leadership, discipline, and a loving approach toward its approach. Prior to the pandemic, the church had facilitated several meetings pertaining to discussions around relocating the church. The church edifice has been deteriorating over time along with its mechanical systems. In addition, the church's property has excessive operating costs. During the pandemic, the church had some significant issues that occurred. Among them were a failing roofing structure, a dispersed congregation, and an aging congregation. Also, there was an ever-evolving shift from traditional families to non-traditional families who attended. These resulting conditions made the congregation double down and begin prospecting for all options like renovating or looking to relocate to a more conducive area with parking and land to build. The church leadership and membership decided to prospect new locations and relocate. These significant shifts and issues that have developed within the church have impacted the mindset of the pastor and the people. I had to self-evaluate how I could be more effective in ministry spiritually and its future success, considering the ebb and flow of the church's condition. The Spirit of God spoke

and led me to devote more time to the ministry to remain together. The church agreed that stabilizing these volatile moments in the ministry and having the effectiveness and availability of the pastor was paramount. As a result, I had to walk by faith, not sight (2 Cor 5:7). I became a full time pastor during the peak of the pandemic when things were at the breaking point in the ministry.

Develop the Synergy

The subject I intend to unpack through my Doctor of Ministry project is providing more effective pastoral care to non-traditional families within the church and community. We will train leaders on the dynamics of families within the 21st-century church context to create a more welcoming atmosphere for non-traditional families. My desire is for families within the church to feel entirely included in God's family and not polarized by traditional systems that exist while upholding biblical truths. It is observed that often people in these non-traditional families feel awkward when they are not the norm in the church setting. Churches are strong when entire families are strengthened and feel a sense of belonging. For example, emotionally and spiritually, we must educate the ministry on the evolving definition of what family is as described today while comparing it to the biblical model of families and mentorship that God has provided us in His Word. The definition of family has become broader. The culture has shifted our family systems. The synergy and foundation of the family should always be through a constant weave of love. The biblical imagery of family has been skewed. A brighter light has been shined on traditional families while non-traditional families within scripture have been glazed over. Our culture is one of glitz and glamour, false realities, practicality, and technologically

driven, while our communication styles conform to the pace of society rather than the process of healthy communication without the aid of our devices such as reality television, movies, multimedia channels of television shows, cell phones, computers, peoples' inattentiveness toward each other, and social media. These outside factors affect and make an impact on the family unit in a variety of ways.

It is my firm belief that ministry makes the minister. I have been taught as a child, as a part of my value systems, that life is not just about getting yours. I was taught that life is about purpose and meaning. It was embedded into my life's fabric that a balanced diet life included service to church and community (to serve on some level). I was taught precisely like the hymn writer said, "If I can help somebody, as I travel along If I can help somebody, with a word or song, If I can help somebody from doing wrong, No, my living shall not be in vain."²³

There was a time when our families were more structured around designated times. Sunday was a sacred day and scheduled time for attending church and eating together at the family table. The family life dynamic has shifted due to blue laws, the modern-day structure of people's time constraints and demands, varied work schedules, constitutional gay marriage laws, breakdown in communication, attention given due to technology and social media, and family weekend sports activities. The result of the breakdown in the family is because of all of these factors and then others. The problem within my church is that the Ebenezer Baptist Church currently experiences difficulty

²³ Alma B. Androzzon, "If I can help somebody," <https://mosaicharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/IfICanHelpSomebody.pdf>.

ministering to families because it possesses an antiquated understanding of what constitutes a family.

Education and increased knowledge and awareness are fundamental to helping the church identify what family models we are dealing with today and treating them like a family. I believe the church has a role in providing pastoral care to all families equally, including non-traditional families, while not sacrificing the biblical marriage union between a man and woman that establishes a family. For years, many of our African American churches have stigmatized single parents' households, teenage parents, divorced parents, blended families, grandparent family systems, foster care family systems, and now the LGBTQ community; and we have not been able to minister to non-traditional families effectively. A non-traditional family has been defined as anything other than a biological one-mom plus one-dad married couple parenting their children.

My spiritual journey began with being born and reared in a nuclear family; then, early on in my life I transitioned into being raised primarily in a non-traditional structure. There was a subliminal awkwardness that I constantly felt growing up in a blended home environment. My parents remarried different people, and I was only eleven years old trying to adapt to this new family system. My circumstances growing up inspired me to minister to others dealing with the same set of circumstances. I want to demonstrate that God's love is unconditional while being a witness for Jesus Christ. Teaching biblical love is necessary for educating families while holding them together through various family dynamics. My hypothesis is if leadership within the context participated in a symposium on the dynamics of family in the 21st century, then they will be equipped to come away

with skills that will help them minister to the needs of the unique family dynamics found in my context.

Our aim as a modern-day congregation should be to effectively minister and provide biblical pastoral care to non-traditional families through developing symposiums, workshops, and programming for leadership within the church to create a strong foundation for welcoming families with love and acceptance. The church needs leadership educational classes that will educate these non-traditional families on the biblical model of family, identify clinical needs within the family, understanding legalities, teach trust within the family, maintain and foster self-esteem, parenting communication, manage jealousies and temperament, understand the dynamic of biblical love and dealing with residual behaviors that stem often from non-traditional family systems.

My passion for the DMIN project is to utilize my spiritual journey and academic background while gleaning from this journey to help the diversity of our church families become more strengthened, welcoming, nurturing, loving, and supportive of the variety of families we have represented within our existing church and community. Non-traditional family dynamics are complex, and one ministry project will not cure all of its dynamics. However, if we can implement spiritual methodical interventions to our leaders and then our members, we can reduce tragedies and breakups and stimulate and strengthen families through biblical education, workshops, and clinical interventions.

The goal of this project is not to further polarize our church families but to educate our leaders better so that they can more effectively minister to families on the definition of an evolving family based on God's Word. God used various non-traditional

life backgrounds to bless His divine work and purposes. A couple of additional goals are to build a love language through the workshops and modalities taught to educate and enhance the foundation of a functional, loving non-traditional family. Moreover, the project is to have the church and its participants reflect and look at various non-traditional families in our communities while becoming more educated and informed on this dynamic to provide better pastoral care, biblical counseling, and nurturing to strengthen the family unit. Many biblical stories can support the argument that God uses more than just Adam and Eve in his created order to orchestrate and perform his divine plan and work. God used Pharoah's daughter to pull Moses out of the water and rescue and eventually adopt Moses into the Egyptian family (Exodus 2:10). God used the relationship between Mordecai and Esther. Queen Esther was an orphan raised by her uncle Mordecai and is eventually married to King Ahasuerus (Esther 4:13-16). God used Timothy's mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois) to spawn his spiritual life (2 Timothy 1:5). Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ grew up in an earthly step-family role model, but He had a Heavenly Father. I will explore the relationship of Eli and Samuel for this project (1 Sam 3:1-19).

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Caring for non-traditional families is crucial to the church's ministry. This proves the church's devotion to accepting and assisting everyone, regardless of family composition. Programs have been developed that provide acceptance and inclusion, backing and enabling, trauma management through pastoral crisis, spiritual sustenance, community strengthening, support for children's growth and upbringing, Christ-like love, and impact on the community¹. In this 21st Century, it is perceived that the church currently experiences difficulty ministering to families because it possesses an antiquated understanding of what constitutes a "family."

To demonstrate Christ's affection and generate a welcoming and accepting community where all families can discover backing and reassurance in their spiritual relationships, the church should offer support, care, and spiritual development for these families. The church may give children from unconventional families more significant nurture by considering their particular needs. 1 Samuel 3:1-19 sheds some light on pastoral care to non-traditional families by demonstrating how God used the priest Eli who is given the task to take Hannah's son Samuel and mentor him in the Temple. A

¹ Annette Mahoney and Elizabeth J. Krumrei, "Questions Left Unaddressed by Religious Familism: Is Spirituality Relevant to Non-traditional Families," *The Oxford Handbook of the Psychology of Spirituality*, ed. Lisa J. Miller (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 125-143.

critical understanding of this passage helps Christians and churches to understand the concept of family in modern society, which could help in embracing non-traditional families to serve them more effectively in the church and the community.²

This passage depicts Samuel perceiving the voice of the Almighty when he was still a youth as the story is told. Samuel served under Eli at the place of worship in Shiloh. In the passage, the Lord calls Samuel's name several times during the night until Samuel realizes it is the Lord speaking. This event marks the start of Samuel's job as a prophet and shows how God communicates with people, even children, preparing them for essential roles serving Him. The main idea in the section revolves around listening to God's voice, understanding His guidance, and acting with obedience and humility.³ The passage highlights God's initiative to speak with people, showing He wants to interact with folks of all ages and backgrounds. Samuel initially thought the voice was Eli calling him, but with Eli's help, he learned to tell God's voice from others. The theme of obedience and humility is emphasized through Samuel's reply, "Speak, for your servant listens," showing a willingness to submit to God's authority and follow His guidance. The passage also introduces Samuel's role as a prophet, underscoring the prophetic nature of God's communication and the duty of those called to share God's word with others. Lastly, God's never-ending love is emphasized through God's repeated calling of Samuel, showing His never-ending love and commitment to speaking with His chosen servant, even in challenging situations.

² 1 Samuel 3:1-19, NRSV. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages are from the English Standard Version of the Bible.

³ Liz Moss, "The Lord Speaks," In All Things, March 25, 2016, 16, <https://inallthings.org/the-lord-speaks/>.

The story of 1 Samuel 3:1-19 supports sub-themes for the DMIN project referring to families that are not traditional in the church and community.⁴ The project hypothesis is “If leadership within the context participate in a symposium on the dynamics of family in the 21st century, then they will be equipped to come away with skills that will help them minister to the needs of the unique family dynamics found in my context.”

This story shows God’s active involvement and speaking with Samuel — showing His involvement in His chosen servant. By listening carefully to God’s direction through prayer, studying the Scriptures, and seeking the Holy Spirit, the church can gain knowledge of God’s heart for all families, including non-traditional ones. The story also highlights God’s inclusivity in selecting Samuel as His prophet, emphasizing the need for the church to accept inclusivity and openness.⁵ This includes not limiting its care and work to traditional family structures but also understanding that non-traditional families are part of God’s plan and deserve church care, love, and help. The church should prepare itself to respond to God’s summons to minister to all families, regardless of their composition. This involves a proactive approach to finding and grasping the exact needs of non-traditional families and building suitable care strategies. Establishing a listening community improves communication and understanding for more effective church care for non-traditional families. Trusting in God’s words of love, grace, and acceptance is essential for the church’s work with non-traditional families. Pastoral care with God’s words can provide a supportive and affirming space for non-traditional families. Thus, 1 Samuel 3:1-19 gives the base rules for the church to serve non-traditional families more

⁴ 1 Samuel 3:1-19.

⁵ 1 Samuel 3:1-19.

effectively in both the church and the community while fitting with the project's idea.

This project seeks to explore and apply strategies for inclusive pastoral care that nurture and help non-traditional families within the church community by training church leaders through a symposium to be equipped to understand a modern understanding of family dynamics amongst the membership.

Many churches and religious communities still focus their pastoral care models on the usual family structure, inadvertently disregarding non-traditional families' exclusive requirements and obstacles.⁶ Families who break with the norm are becoming more common. Churches must react sensitively when there is an alteration to family patterns. Families that do not meet the unique requirements of traditional households may lead to feelings of alienation, disconnection, and spiritual struggle that obstruct their participation in church life.

The objective of this project is to build a well-reasoned theology surrounding family life, incorporating households beyond the normative unit, evaluate the needs of congregants, and draft a comprehensive plan to meet the spiritual and relational needs of people from different backgrounds by employing improved pastoral practices, amplified welcome of all, family connection, holistic advancement, and portrayal of wholesome communities. Faith communities with compassionate goals could emerge by increasing people's desire for spiritual development and knowledge.⁷ Congregations dedicated to comprehensive pastoral care can attract those searching for compassionate religious

⁶ Ann-Marie Desmond, "The double bind for non-traditional families in post-primary settings: to tell or not to tell their family identity," PhD diss., University College Cork, 2014, 28.

⁷ Mahoney and Krumrei, "Questions left unaddressed by religious familism," 125-143.

fellowships. This project intends to broaden the church's capacity to handle challenges involving all families by tackling this concern and encouraging a caring and welcoming environment by training church leaders to broaden their understanding of the 21st Century family among the membership.

Exegesis

Historical and Cultural Context

The Book of 1 Samuel is set between 1100 B.C and 1010 B.C when the Israelites were transitioning from the period of judges to monarchy. The Book opens with Samuel's birth, describing the role of judges and the anointing of Kings.⁸ "First and Second Samuel derive their name from the individual whom God used to establish kingship in Israel. Samuel is the most prominent figure in the early narratives of 1 Samuel. His key role in leading the nation of Israel through the transition from the period of the judges to that of the monarchy warrants the use of his name as the title for the book."⁹ A deep religious decline occurred among the Israelite people during the time of the judges when idolatry and wickedness impacted their sense of self. Because of the actions of Hophni and Phinehas, two of Eli's sons, the clergy, who were overseen by judges, military leaders, and spiritual leaders, had become corrupt. With the women who came to worship at the Tabernacle, these men committed wicked transgressions and acted immorally. The people

⁸ *English Standard Bible*, "Introduction to 1–2 Samuel," 2023, 3, <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-1-2-samuel/#:~:text=1050%20B.C.Saul%20as%20Israel's%20first%20king.>

⁹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Samuel, Books of First and Second," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1891-1893.

of Israel desired a king to rule over them, similar to the surrounding nations. This led Samuel to anoint Saul as the first King of the Israelites. Despite his success, Saul had some faults and failures like disobedience, ultimately leading to God's rejection of him as King.¹⁰ The Book of Judges precedes 1 Samuel and covers a cycle of disobedience, oppression, repentance, and deliverance, as the Israelites repeatedly turned away from God and fell into idolatry. The Book of Judges mentions that no sovereign ruler existed in that era over Israel. During that era, individuals performed deeds that seemed righteous in their perceptions. This context sets the stage for the transition to a monarchy in Israel, with 1 Samuel narrating the rise of the prophet Samuel and the establishment of the monarchy under King Saul and later King David. Therefore, the setting of 1 Samuel sets the stage for the development of the monarchy in Israel, showcasing the nation's spiritual journey, triumphs, and failures. The text underscores the necessity of complying with and adhering to God's directions as manifested in the stories of Samuel, Saul, and David by concentrating on how adherence and loyalty to God's instructions are noteworthy, stressing how obedience and faithfulness to God's commands matter greatly.

1 Samuel 3:1 begins by describing the spiritual climate of the time that was marked by a scarcity of divine revelation, indicating a period of spiritual decline and disconnection between God and His people.¹¹ Eli, the high priest, played a significant role in the narrative. However, his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were corrupt and abusive in their priestly positions, contributing to the nation's spiritual decline. Their wickedness included manipulation of offerings and immoral behavior with women who served at the

¹⁰ Serge Frolov, *Judges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 29.

¹¹ 1 Samuel 3:1.

entrance to the tent of the meeting.¹² In 1 Samuel 3:1-19, God's revelation to the boy Samuel is a pivotal juncture for Israel, sparking God's recommencement of communication with His people. This is a turning point in their shared historical chronicle.¹³ The Lord chose Samuel to be His mouthpiece and prophet, bridging the gap between God and the nation. This event foreshadows the restoration of spiritual leadership in Israel and sets the stage for the transition from a time of judges to the establishment of a monarchy. Eli's sons' corrupt behavior exacerbated the situation. Still, Samuel's prophetic call signals divine revelation and the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, emphasizing the need to renew and restore God's communication. Therefore, in this way, the happenings delineated in 1 Samuel established the basis for founding the Davidic royal line and played a pivotal part in the more extensive unfolding of the Old Testament, forming an indispensable part of its purpose.

About the DMin problem statement, the historical context of this passage highlights the importance of God's direct communication with Samuel. It also emphasizes the significance of attentiveness, responsiveness, and profound discernment in making moral decisions. It emphasizes the importance of listening to God's voice, serving as a model for all families, and guiding them in building profound discernment to address unique challenges and make moral decisions. The account also reminds us of God's redemptive and remedial work, even in defective families, and emphasizes the importance of sensitivity to non-traditional families' unique needs and challenges. The contemporary assembly of families can be better served by understanding God's voice

¹² 1 Samuel 2:12-22.

¹³ 1 Samuel 3:1-19.

and call and supporting attentiveness to His voice, emphasizing servanthood while applying discipline with love through recognizing the spirit of God's voice through discernment in all family matters.

Literary Context

Genre and Literary Style

The Book of 1 Samuel belongs to the historical narrative genre within the Bible. It is written in straightforward prose, chronologically describing events and characters. However, it also incorporates elements of poetry and prophecy, such as Hannah's prayer and Samuel's prophetic ministry. These poetic sections add depth and emotion to the narrative. 1 Samuel introduces pivotal characters, including Samuel, the prophet, who anoints Saul and David as kings; Saul, the first king of Israel; David, the shepherd; and Hannah, who reflects faith and divine intervention.¹⁴

Historical Context

1 Samuel is set in a turbulent period of ancient Israel's history, spanning the late Judges era to the early monarchy. It is crucial to understand the historical context to appreciate the Book fully. During this time, Israel was a loose confederation of tribes without a centralized government. The Philistines, a formidable neighboring power, posed a constant threat. The Book of Samuel is not merely a historical account but also carries profound spiritual and theological messages like faith and obedience as Hannah's

¹⁴ Tony W. Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, ed. Samuel E. Balentine and P. Keith Gammons (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Incorporated, 2001), 26.

confidence and trust in God's providence, as well as the obedience of individuals like Samuel in contrast with the disobedience of Saul. Another message of leadership and God's sovereignty depicts the recognition that human leaders, while significant, are subject to God's ultimate sovereignty. God remains in control of events, often working through imperfect individuals to fulfill His plans.

Transition to Monarchy

The primary narrative thrust of 1 Samuel revolves around the transition from the era of judges to establishing the monarchy in Israel. Samuel, a significant figure in the Book, serves as the bridge between these two periods. His birth and early life, marked by the miraculous intervention of God, set the stage for the prophetic and leadership role he would later assume.¹⁵

Messianic Foreshadowing

The Book of 1 Samuel holds Messianic significance. David, anointed by Samuel, foreshadows the awaited Messiah in Christianity. The concept of a divinely chosen and anointed king points to Jesus as the ultimate King and Savior.

Political and Social Commentary

The Book of Samuel reflects on the political and social challenges of the times. Despite the risks associated with centralized power, it highlights the Israelites' desire for

¹⁵ Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: Deuteronomy-1 Samuel* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 267.

a king like the surrounding nations. This mirrors a broader theme of humanity's tendency to seek security and solutions in worldly authority rather than God. As recorded in 1 Samuel 1:1-8, even in the days of the judges, when "there was no king in Israel," and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25), there were many godly families scattered through the land.¹⁶

Lessons for Today

The lessons from 1 Samuel remain relevant today. 1 Samuel 3:1-19 highlights the corruption within the priesthood and the sinful deeds of Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. The prophetic declaration of judgment on the house of Eli highlights the consequences of moral decline and the failure of customary family structures. It reminds readers of the importance of faith, obedience, and recognizing God's sovereignty in their lives. It also serves as a caution about the consequences of disobedience and the potential dangers of pursuing power and security at the expense of trusting in God.

Spiritual sensitivity and discernment are critical themes highlighted in the passage through the character of Samuel. "Samuel did not know that God was calling him until Eli taught him to say, "Speak Lord for your servant is listening." When Samuel learned this lesson and continued to apply it through his many years of service, God was able once again to speak through a faithful prophet to his people, Israel. God speaks to us regularly through the scriptures. Our spiritual listening skills as Christians are developed

¹⁶ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *1 Samuel*, The Pulpit Commentary (London, UK: New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 7.

by God's voice toward us and aid us in our interactions within our family systems."¹⁷

However, spiritual discernment is understanding something through spiritual power. 1

Samuel 3:1 states, "the boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions." Samuel, a young priest, served in the sanctuary under the priest Eli, highlighting the importance of spiritual sensitivity and discernment in recognizing God's voice and responding to His call.

According to the commentary of Brent A. Strawn, we find that Samuel was serving under Eli, even though he had not yet known the Lord or received His word.¹⁸ This seeming contradiction is explained as a narrative interruption, highlighting Samuel's service under Eli and his dependence on him. The account shows Samuel mistaking God's voice for Eli's, emphasizing his subservience to Eli. However, Samuel's role shifts after God's call, and Eli becomes dependent on him for God's word. The passage illustrates the transition of authority from Eli to Samuel and, ultimately, to all of Israel, as Samuel becomes the channel through which God's messages are delivered.

Samuel's active listening is a testament to his openness to divine revelation despite the rarity of divine communication. According to Iulian Faraoanu, discernment holds significant value in 1 Samuel 3, with a heightened relevance in today's information and globalization age.¹⁹ This study identifies three main characteristics of vocation: separating God's will, divine mandate, and subsequent assignment. Samuel's interaction

¹⁷ Stephen Andrews and Robert D. Bergen, *Holman Old Testament Commentary – 1, 2 Samuel*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 36.

¹⁸ Brent A. Strawn, "Commentary on 1 Samuel 3:1-21," Working Preacher from Luther Seminary, November 11, 2020, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/god-calls-samuel/commentary-on-1-samuel-31-21>.

¹⁹ Iulian Faraoanu, "Samuel, symbol of discernment (1 Samuel 3)," *The Expository Times* 130, no. 3 (2018): 6-7.

with God showcases the stages of listening, comprehension, and compliance with spiritual directions.²⁰ As Michael H. Koplitz notes, Samuel's account underscores the significance of perceiving and responding to God's summons, a crucial aspect that applies particularly to non-traditional families.²¹ Clans encountering such obstacles require divine guidance which is vital. The prophets' account highlights that the deity's search is domestic-framework independent. Despite communal demands and preconceptions, pursuing heavenly guidance becomes vital for these families. As Samuel learned to discern the Almighty's voice, unconventional families must develop a culture of attentiveness to the Almighty's direction. Theological and spiritual aspects of discernment are explored with the ultimate goal of encouraging modern individuals to actively listen, discern God's will, and respond obediently to His calling. In Chapter 3:3 of 1 Samuel, it says that Samuel was lying down in the Temple of the Lord. That Samuel is described as lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was (3:3), has led some to speculate that they have been engaging in a well-attested ancient Near Eastern practice called "incubation." Incubation involves spending a night in the Temple precinct in the hope of receiving a divine vision or dream. God speaks to us and we must have willing spirits to hear his voice within our church and families; however, in order to hear God, we must be fully saturated and incubated.²²

²⁰ Iulian Faraoanu, "Samuel, symbol of discernment (1 Samuel 3)," *The Expository Times* 130, no. 3 (2018): 108.

²¹ Michael H. Koplitz, "Hebraic Analysis for 1 Samuel 3:1-21," Academia.edu, June 6, 2018, https://www.academia.edu/36791435/Hebraic_Analysis_for_1_Samuel_3_1_21.

²² John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 282.

Eli's role as a mentor is crucial as he helps Samuel discern God's call and purpose for his life. In 1 Samuel 3:6-8, the Lord called Samuel multiple times in the dead of night, yet the youthful prophet mistook the voice for Eli's.²³ Realizing the third time, Eli understood that God was speaking to Samuel and told him to respond as necessary. Through his mentorship, Eli directed Samuel in grasping the divine call on his life and the voice of God. The exchange between Samuel and Eli highlights the significance of seasoned mentors in fostering and guiding individuals along their spiritual path. The mentorship relationship between Samuel and his mentor significantly contributed to his evolution into a prophet, emphasizing the essential role mentorship plays in spiritual exploration and judgment. The mentorship provided by Eli to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3: 1-19 holds great significance in spiritual growth and discernment.²⁴ Through Eli's wise direction, Samuel better understood God's voice and purpose for his life. In our non-traditional family roles, we are often called to be mentors toward one another and we must caretake for these roles with extreme sensitivity, discernment, and love to foster stronger and healthier Christian family units.

Eli's character is an exciting aspect, even though the focus lies on Samuel's prophetic endeavors.²⁵ Eli's development from mistakes to enhanced priestly responses depicts a learning process. Through three attempts, Eli realizes God's calling on Samuel. The narrative hints at Eli's declining eyesight as a clue to his ways, consistent with his

²³ 1 Samuel 3:6-8.

²⁴ 1 Samuel 3:1-19.

²⁵ Brent A. Strawn, "Commentary on 1 Samuel 3:1-21," Working Preacher from Luther Seminary, November 11, 2020, 8, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/god-calls-samuel/commentary-on-1-samuel-31-21>.

previous misperceptions. Eli's confrontation with his scoundrel sons, Hophni and Phineas, shows his attempts to address their wrongdoing. However, it ultimately leads to the knowledge that his priesthood will end with him. The contrasting fortunes of Eli's house and Samuel's favor with God and the people are evident, underscoring their different destinies.²⁶ The relationship between the mentor and mentee played a crucial role in shaping Samuel's journey toward becoming a prophet. This exemplifies the importance of spiritual mentorship in guiding individuals to discern God's leading and purpose in their lives. The passage underscores the importance of mentorship within the setting of pastoral oversight of non-traditional families and the wider ecclesiastical community, where spiritual direction and backing can assist persons in comprehending their distinct callings while cultivating a more intimate bond with the divine.

In relation to the problem statement, the findings from various sources highlight the significance of spiritual sensitivity and discernment as exemplified through the character of Samuel and his mentor, Eli. Samuel's journey of learning to discern God's voice and respond with humility and attentiveness is pertinent to the DMIN project's hypothesis. Like Samuel, the church needs spiritual sensitivity and discernment to recognize and respond to the unique needs and challenges faced by non-traditional families.²⁷ Eli's function as a mentor, in addition, highlights the importance of seasoned spiritual leaders in nurturing and supporting persons in their spiritual expeditions.

²⁶ Brent A. Strawn, "Commentary on 1 Samuel 3:1-21," Working Preacher from Luther Seminary, November 11, 2020, 8, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/god-calls-samuel/commentary-on-1-samuel-31-21>.

²⁷ Valori Mulvey Sherer, "How the Theology and Praxis of Christian Marriage Have Been Shaped by Scripture, Tradition, and Experience, and how that Informs the Church's Current Response to Non-traditional Marriage," PhD diss., University of the South, 2010, 210.

Samuel's journey from confusion to understanding exemplifies the discernment process as he responds with humility and attentiveness to God's call. Spiritual sensitivity often requires creating space for silence and stillness, while allowing individuals to quiet their minds and hearts to listen attentively to God. Engaging in intentional spiritual formation, such as serving in the sanctuary under Eli, can foster spiritual sensitivity and discernment.²⁸ Samuel's call to prophethood emphasizes spiritual sensitivity and discernment, teaching individuals to listen and respond to God's voice. Mentors, spiritual practices, and active participation in formation help cultivate spiritual sensitivity, recognize God's call, and faithfully respond to His leading. This chapter of Samuel remains relevant today and fosters a deeper connection with God and insightful faith. When a culture of God-centered attention, active listening, and spiritual formation is cultivated, the church can successfully serve non-traditional families and fully incorporate them into the faith community. The story of Samuel's call and discernment provides an enduring example of God's guidance and inspires individuals and churches to develop spiritual sensitivity and understanding in serving non-traditional families.

God's Calling and Purpose

In 1 Samuel 3:4-6, God calls upon Samuel in a pivotal historical moment. Humility resonates within Samuel's words, "Here I am," while Eli misinterprets the summons as a personal greeting.²⁹ The priest's call had directed him twice to Eli, only to be informed that Eli had not called him. However, Samuel persists in paying heed to

²⁸ Mosheh Garsi'el, *The Book of Samuel: Studies in History, Historiography, Theology and Poetics Combined* (Berlin, Germany: Rubin Mass Publishers 2018), 18.

²⁹ 1 Samuel 3:4-6.

God's summoning; his commitment to listening and obeying was evident, demonstrating his compliance. God's nature is significant in these three verses, especially when God's voice names Samuel. This passage emphasizes Samuel's readiness to serve God. The value of spiritual sensitivity and discernment is highlighted in recognizing God's voice. It emphasizes that God takes the initiative in reaching out to individuals, calling them to specific roles and purposes. It demonstrates God's interest in each person and His desire to involve them in His divine plan. These verses present a scarcity of revelation in Israel, as Samuel cannot recognize God's voice. In 1 Samuel 3, the passage begins by emphasizing the scarcity of revelation and the rarity of God's word in Israel during that time. Samuel, the young boy serving in the sanctuary under the priest Eli, ministered to the Lord just as Aaron and his sons did at their consecration as priests.³⁰ Unfortunately, even though he served faithfully, the Lord's message was heard only seldom during his ministry. It was often a word of judgment.³¹ R. Walter L. Moberly explores the theme of revelation and spiritual discernment in this narrative. He emphasizes God's voice's mystery and imaginative appeal, speaking to a child who does not immediately comprehend what is happening. However, he eventually learns to hear God's word for himself.³²

God's repeated calling of Samuel and his initial confusion in distinguishing God's voice from Eli's shows the significance of spiritual discernment in the call of Samuel. Moberly suggests that this aspect of the story has received less attention than it deserves

³⁰ Exodus 29:1.

³¹ Acts 13:1-2.

³² R. Walter L. Moberly, "To hear the master's voice: revelation and spiritual discernment in the call of Samuel," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 48, no. 4 (1995): 468.

in scholarly commentary.³³ Moberly's article highlights the importance of spiritual discernment in recognizing and responding to God's call and Samuel's spiritual growth and development as he learns to discern God's voice.³⁴ This setting sets the stage for Samuel's inability to recognize God's voice when the Lord calls him at night. The passage highlights that Samuel, although devotedly serving in the sanctuary, had yet to learn about the Lord or receive His word. The scarcity of revelation and the lack of widespread communication from God might have contributed to Samuel's initial confusion when God called him. Pastoral care incorporating spiritual mentorship and encouraging spiritual discernment can help non-traditional families grow in their faith journey and sense of calling within the church and community.

Additionally, the passage suggests that the rarity of God's word was due to the spiritual condition of the people of Israel and the corruption among the priesthood.³⁵ The people's hardness of heart and the corruption within the religious leadership hindered God's communication with them. Despite Samuel's devotion to ministering before the Lord, his spiritual sensitivity and discernment were still developing. This inability to recognize God's voice illustrates the need for guidance and mentorship in discerning God's call and direction. In this case, Eli played a crucial role as a mentor to Samuel, guiding him in understanding and responding to God's call.³⁶ Just as Samuel needed guidance and mentorship to discern God's voice, non-traditional families might also

³³ Moberly, "To hear the master's voice," 462.

³⁴ Moberly, "To hear the master's voice," 462.

³⁵ Caleb Froehlich, *10.1. A Dark Dream: God's Calling of Samuel and the Ministry of Eli (1 Samuel 3)* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publisher, 2019), 18.

³⁶ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 11.

require support and spiritual sensitivity in navigating their unique circumstances. The scarcity of revelation and the challenges faced by non-traditional families may make it difficult for them to recognize God's leading and respond appropriately. Pastoral care ought to encompass providing spiritual mentorship, lending an ear to God's direction, and fostering a setting where non-conventional families can expand in comprehending God's summons and justification. The passage emphasizes the importance of spiritual sensitivity and discernment for individuals like Samuel and the church in providing effective pastoral care to all families, regardless of their structure.

In 1 Samuel 3:2-4, we encounter a critical juncture in Samuel's life as God initially calls out to him.³⁷ The passage is rich in symbolism and carries several profound meanings. Firstly, Eli's failing eyesight symbolizes not only his physical condition but also his inability to provide effective spiritual leadership for Israel. It represents the dark spiritual times in the nation, where the word of the Lord was rare and divine revelation was scarce. Next, the allusion to the lamp of God becoming extinguished within the Tabernacle carries both an actual and metaphorical significance. It indicates the time before dawn. Symbolically, it suggests the declining spiritual condition of Israel, signifying the need for God's divine intervention and guidance in their lives. Amidst this spiritual decline, we see Samuel's readiness to respond to God's call. Despite his young age, his heart was receptive to God's voice. His immediate and humble response of "Here I am" exemplifies his availability and willingness to serve God, signifying a posture of submission and attentiveness to God's will. Samuel's "Here I am" response is not unique to him; it echoes the same reply given by other faithful servants of God throughout the

³⁷ 1 Samuel 3:2-4.

Bible. When summoned by Yahweh for commissions comparable to those directed at other sentinels of faith from antiquity, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, and Ananias reacted similarly in conformity with Genesis 22:1.³⁸ The response highlights how being receptive and mindful of God's summons in our journeys, irrespective of maturity or roots, maintains relevance.

In his commentary, Roger Nam seeks to display this humanity to God and God's servants by foregoing his agency and putting the agency of God first.³⁹ Thus, the passage in 1 Samuel 3 portrays Samuel's full humanity, encompassing eagerness, confusion, maturity, and affirmation as he responds to God's call. Despite being chosen by God as a prophet, Samuel's human experience remains authentic and relatable. The narrative follows Samuel's journey from his initial call to his eventual success as a prophet, military leader, and intercessor for Israel.⁴⁰ The passage showcases the struggles and complexities within one of Israel's pivotal prophets, allowing readers to relate to their communities' challenges in their walk with God. It emphasizes the preciousness of God's word and encourages a receptive heart to listen and respond to His voice.

These verses are relevant to the DMIN project statement on "pastoral care to non-traditional families" and the hypothesis of identifying what a family is today. The passage emphasizes the necessity of spiritual sensitivity and discernment, especially during spiritual decline and uncertainty. As pastoral care seeks to embrace and serve non-

³⁸ Genesis 22:1.

³⁹ Roger Nam, "Commentary on 1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]," Working Preacher from Luther Seminary, November 11, 2020, 20, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-2/commentary-on-1-samuel-31-10-11-20-3>.

⁴⁰ NaM, "Commentary on 1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]," 20.

traditional families effectively, it must encourage a receptive heart towards God's voice and leading. Just as Samuel demonstrated readiness to respond to God's call, families, regardless of their structure, should be open to hearing God's guidance and be willing to submit to His will.⁴¹ Besides, the symbolism of Eli's dim eyes and the lamp of God going out serves as a poignant reminder for the church to remain vigilant and attentive to spiritual growth and renewal. Pastoral care should address the spiritual conditions of individuals and families, guiding them to seek God's presence and direction in challenging times. In conclusion, these verses convey timeless principles of spiritual sensitivity and responsiveness to God's call. They provide valuable insights for effective pastoral care and nurturing non-traditional families within the church community, urging all to be attentive to God's voice and obedient to His leading.

Obedience, Faithfulness, and Humility

Samuel's obedience and humility are remarkable in his response to God's call. Throughout the passage of 1 Samuel 3:1-19, Samuel consistently emphasizes his eagerness to respond to God's voice by repeatedly affirming his role as the Lord's servant, illustrating his willingness. Upon hearing the call in the night, the boy Samuel, assuming it was the high priest Eli who had summoned him, humbly approached Eli in obedience to the instruction the priest had previously given him to respond to the heavenly call with the words "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening," as Eli had directed him to lie down when God called Samuel.⁴² We find that this scenario indicates

⁴¹ Aiden Wilson Tozer, *The Pursuit of God/God's Pursuit of Man Devotional* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2013), 33.

⁴² 1 Samuel 3:9.

the humble nature and obedience of Samuel. He followed the guidance of his mentor and leader, Eli, showing how ready he was to serve God. Samuel responded to God with humility, which is a sign of faithfulness and divine attentiveness.

Despite Eli's initial confusion, he recognizes that God is calling Samuel. He instructs him to respond, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."⁴³ This simple yet profound declaration encapsulates Samuel's obedience and humility. He immediately positions himself as a servant, eager to hear and obey God's commands. Samuel's self-designation as a "servant" betokens his acquiescence to submitting beneath God's dominion and his alacrity to fulfill the will of the Divine, irrespective of the character or trouble of the work in hand. Samuel's obedient response to God's call becomes even more commendable when we consider the context in which he lived.⁴⁴ The priesthood was corrupt, and Eli's sons had strayed from righteousness. As a young boy, Samuel could have easily succumbed to the prevailing moral decline or been influenced by the misconduct of the priests around him. Nevertheless, his steadfast conformity to divine summons distinguishes him as a lamp of virtue in an era of spiritual murkiness.

Samuel's humility, strikingly evident in his words, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening," reflects the posture of one who recognizes God's authority and wisdom through a willingness to listen with an open mind and heart for divine instruction. He does not approach God with his agenda or opinions but submits himself as a vessel to

⁴³ 1 Samuel 3:10.

⁴⁴ Missionary Kenya, "Heard a Voice from Heaven Say," *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times* 21 (2012): 41.

hear and carry out God's will.⁴⁵ This humility is vital for any prophet or messenger of God as it allows them to convey God's messages without distortion or personal bias faithfully. As Samuel grows into his role as a prophet, obedience and humility remain foundational traits. He earns a reputation as a loyal prophet who attentively listens to the divine voice, fearlessly conveying the messages from the Almighty to the masses. His obedience to God's instructions, such as anointing David as the future king despite the risks and challenges involved, further demonstrates his unwavering commitment to God's will.⁴⁶ In the context of pastoral care and the contemporary church, Samuel's example of obedience and humility holds valuable lessons. It underscores the necessity for cultivating an attitude of attentiveness and receptivity to responding to God's summons within the lives of the faithful. Fostering in people an attitude of humility before God, where they are willing to submit to His authority and follow His leadership, can advance them into a closer and more purposeful bond with Him.

Moreover, Samuel's story encourages pastoral caregivers to instill a sense of courage and conviction in believers. Like Samuel, they can find strength and confidence in their obedience to God's call despite the challenges and uncertainties that may arise. They can trust that He will equip and empower them to fulfill their purpose. Samuel's obedience and humility in responding to God's call are exemplary traits in his life as a prophet and servant of God.⁴⁷ His willingness to submit to God's authority, listen attentively, and humbly carry out His will set the stage for his faithful and impactful

⁴⁵ Kenneth L. Chafin, *The Preacher's Commentary - Vol. 08: 1 and 2 Samuel* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 28.

⁴⁶ Richard N. Pitt, *Divine Callings: Understanding the Call to Ministry in Black Pentecostalism* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2012), 12.

⁴⁷ Chafin, *The Preacher's Commentary - Vol. 08: 1 and 2 Samuel*, 28.

ministry. As a role model, Samuel motivates the church to prioritize a spirit of obedience, humility, and God-ward focus in pastoral ministry and current church culture. By making this decision, you will deepen your relationship with God and lead a life marked by faithful service.

Pastoral caregivers must embody these qualities within the framework of the DMIN project on “Pastoral care to non-traditional families.” With humility and love, pastoral care involves adherence to God’s guidance and faithful service to diverse families. Samuel’s exemplary response embodies obedience, faithfulness, and humility, offering a sterling example for all to follow. Samuel’s message prompts pastoral caregivers to attend to God’s direction in their ministry, faithfully caring for non-traditional families and doing so with humility and empathy. Like Samuel, pastoral caregivers can effectively embrace and support the diverse spiritual journeys of non-traditional families.

God’ Judgment and Faithfulness

God holds Eli's family responsible for their misdeeds in verses 11-14. Due to Eli’s inaction towards his sons’ wickedness, his family faced dire consequences. God’s holiness and righteousness take center stage, emphasizing leaders’ duty to lead with integrity. In 1 Samuel 3:11-14, God’s message to Samuel indicates the inevitable retribution for Eli and his household’s immoral conduct.⁴⁸ The severity of this message underscores previous warnings and finalizes judgment with dire consequences. The judgment’s severity underscores the gravity of Eli’s offenses toward God. Eli’s

⁴⁸ 1 Samuel 3:11-14.

familiarity with the misdeeds of his kin exposes his lack of authoritative leadership and willingness to tolerate their misdeeds.⁴⁹ Irreversibility underscores the opportunity for forgiveness and repentance has long passed, leaving their actions' consequences etched in stone. This passage cautions individuals to seek forgiveness through Jesus Christ's sacrifice by highlighting the importance of taking their relationship with God seriously. Essential for seeking divine forgiveness, repentance and humility go hand in hand.

In 1 Samuel 3:11-14, as he approaches Eli, Samuel shares a divine message despite fearing it might not hold ground. Eli encourages Samuel to be truthful and unambiguous, revealing the complete content of the divine message. This moment demonstrates their integrity and humility, showcasing their obedience and faithfulness to God.⁵⁰ Samuel's growth as a prophet is evident in his physical and spiritual maturity, with God ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of his prophecies. The passage concludes by affirming that the LORD continues to reveal Himself to Samuel at Shiloh through His word — emphasizing the importance of divine communication and guidance through His word. Based on the DMin statement, this verse emphasizes the importance of divine revelation in guiding pastoral caregivers. Seeking God's wisdom through His word equips caregivers to address non-traditional families' unique challenges. God's continual revelation enables caregivers to offer spiritual guidance firmly rooted in His truth, supporting these families on their journey.

Encouraging prayer and reflection cultivates spiritual perception, deepening their connection with the divine. The unconventional family structure is met with recognition

⁴⁹ Samiuela Hukehuke, "Knowledge & Power in 1 Samuel 3: A Narrative-critical Reading," PhD diss., Flinders University, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, 2019, 19.

⁵⁰ 1 Samuel 3:15-18.

and appreciation for their tenacity and determination. Eli's reaction is humble acceptance, acknowledging God's supremacy and trusting His just decisions. The enduring nature of God's favor towards Samuel is evident despite criticisms underscoring his divine appointment as a prophet and leader for Israel. The importance of addressing disobedience and wrongdoing is highlighted in these verses for pastoral caregivers. When attuning to God's intentions and invoking His direction, pastoral caregivers can extend empathetic support and care to non-traditional families, recognizing God's supremacy and reliability amid trying times.

Relevance for Modern Families

The passage of 1 Samuel 3:1-19 highlights God's commitment to connecting with people from diverse family origins. By emphasizing inclusivity, God's call reaches every family, regardless of composition. In this passage, the pattern of God calling Samuel three times in 1 Samuel 3:1-19 underscores God's steadfast pursuit of individuals. The Divine's kindness, patience, and longing for companionship are reflected in the pattern. The connection between three and completion, perfection, and fulfillment run deep in biblical literature.⁵¹ Persistence can provide hope and support to unconventional families by offering this reassurance. Caregivers in pastoral roles should embody patience and perseverance, trusting that God is actively involved in their patient's lives. With persistence, families remain open and attentive to God's guidance, even as they seek to understand His voice.

⁵¹ Solomon O. Ademiluka, "Hannah's prayer for a male child: Interpreting 1 Samuel 1: 11 in the Nigerian context," *die Skriflig* 55, no. 1 (2021): 8.

Modern family diversity challenges the notion that God's message is exclusive to specific family structures. The story of Samuel's calling reassures non-traditional families that they are not excluded from God's plan and purpose; their worth lies in their relationship with God. The passage serves as a guiding principle for the church, encouraging an inclusive environment where all families feel valued and supported. Pastoral caregivers and leaders can use Samuel's story to emphasize the importance of discernment and responsiveness to God's call in all family life. By cultivating a habit of prayer and active listening for God's guidance, families can experience God's love and grace in their lives. The church's endorsement of inclusiveness cultivates a faith community that is both vibrantly alive and remarkably diverse by mirroring God's love for the entirety of His creation. Samuel's calling illustrates God's inclusive nature, encouraging modern families to embrace their unique identities and find confidence in their relationship with God.

Evolving Notions of Family

The passage of Samuel's upbringing under Eli's care in the temple presents a non-traditional family structure for its time, resonating with the diverse family situations in contemporary society. "Such contemporary sentiments arguably reflect the scriptural setting for God's calling of Samuel. However, they are expressed less through a lack of hearing, as through a lack of vision."⁵² The passage challenges the church to embrace and support these evolving notions of family rather than alienating or stigmatizing them. It reminds us that God's plan and love extend beyond traditional family structures, inviting

⁵² Froehlich, "10.1. A Dark Dream," 190.

all families into His embrace, regardless of their composition. The church must understand and appreciate the diverse family situations within its congregation and community while providing support, guidance, and resources to navigate through unique challenges.⁵³ Upholding an inclusive theology enables the church to break down barriers and build a diverse, united faith community. As the church reflects God's heart in embracing evolving notions of family, it becomes a place of sanctuary, hope, and transformation for all individuals and families seeking to walk with God on their unique journeys.

Conclusion

1 Samuel 3:1-19 explores pastoral care for non-traditional families, emphasizing God's active role and speaking with Samuel.⁵⁴ The text discusses God's strategy for communicating with individuals and readying them for essential roles in serving Him. This project aims to develop a comprehensive theology of family life, encompassing households beyond the conventional family structure. The project analyzes individuals' spiritual and interpersonal needs from diverse backgrounds, crafting a tailored plan for leadership within the church to become educated in ministering to 21st century non-traditional family systems. Church gatherings focusing on comprehensive pastoral care can draw individuals seeking compassionate religious fellowship.

Obedience and faithful adherence to God's guidelines are highlighted in the text as essential for true devotion and commitment. In this period of spiritual dryness, the

⁵³ Stephen B. Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture: a Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 30-31.

⁵⁴ 1 Samuel 3:1-19.

atmosphere was marked by a lack of divine guidance, indicating a time of spiritual recession among God's people. Eli, the high priest, was an essential character in the narrative, but his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were corrupt and misused their priestly roles. God's revelation to Samuel is crucial for Israel, initiating the communication period between God and His people.

The prophetic significance of Samuel's calling extends beyond his role as a prophet, as it foretold his future role as a shepherd and an anointed ruler in Israel.⁵⁵ The DMin project strives to discover and incorporate these family structures into the church and community. Eli's part as a mentor proves to be essential in orienting Samuel's path toward turning into a prophet and highlights the significance of mentoring in religious development and discernment, especially within a variety of non-traditional family structures.

1 Samuel 3:1-19 provides a timeless example of searching for God's guidance and inspiring religious organizations and communities to cultivate spiritual awareness and discernment in their ministry to non-traditional families. The DMin project statement on pastoral care for non-traditional families requires more emphasis on spiritual awareness and sensitivity.⁵⁶ Pastoral care should encompass spiritual mentorship, listening to God's direction, and nurturing a setting where non-traditional families can expand in understanding God's summons and justification.⁵⁷ The text explains the necessity of being spiritually sensitive and responsive to God's call to care for unconventional

⁵⁵ *Enduring Word Bible Commentary*, "1 Samuel Chapter 3," March 2, 2023, 23, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-samuel-3/>.

⁵⁶ Roy L. Heller, *1 Samuel (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible)* (ADA, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 234.

⁵⁷ 1 Samuel 3:1-19.

families within the church community. Samuel's exemplary obedience, humility, and revelations are impressive traits as a prophet and divine servant. These qualities are necessary for pastoral caregivers to possess as they require God's guidance, obedience, and ministering to families of different types. Their love and compassion should be evident in their interactions.

The inclusive divine call serves as a guide for the church to offer pastoral care. The congregation must strive to be where all families feel at home, irrespective of their configuration. Families traditionally excluded from the faith community can feel valued and supported thanks to the church emphasizing God's inclusive love. The passage of 1 Samuel 3:1-19 emphasizes that diverse family backgrounds are showcased within God's inclusivity and communication. Understanding this truth allows families today to seek joy in their life path. Welcoming inclusivity and promoting a supportive environment for faith can be achieved by the church, so it should be a welcoming, diverse, and accepting community.

Samuel's story under Eli's guidance in the temple encompasses the focus on families rather than exclusion or rejection. Acknowledging each family's inherent worth and dignity can foster an environment of acceptance, love, and inclusion within the church. Families can feel safe and supported in expressing their joys and struggles when pastoral caregivers and church leaders create an atmosphere that encourages openness.⁵⁸ Initiating open and respectful conversations can dismantle stereotypes and misconceptions regarding diverse family structures and offer guidance, encouragement,

⁵⁸ Opoku Onyinah, *Apostles and Prophets: The Ministry of Apostles and Prophets throughout the Generations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022), 132.

and resources to navigate these situations with faith and resilience. For a better open and understanding dialogue within the church, families can find support, direction, and understanding. This text emphasizes the significance of being spiritually sensitive and responsive to God's call to nurture non-traditional families within the church community.

In conclusion, 1 Samuel 3:1-19 guides churches to provide pastoral care to non-traditional families, emphasizing God's all-inclusive love and clear communication. This would emphasize themes of obedience, faithfulness, and divine revelation for caregivers and families. This method aligns with the issue statement and hypothesis helping create a broader environment, offering acceptance, integration, trauma management, spiritual sustenance, and Christ-like love. Eli's mentoring guidance significantly enhanced Samuel's spiritual development and judgment. The main text underscores the importance of being spiritually aware and responsive to God's direction in pastoral work. Churches should be open, diverse, and accepting communities that value and support all families. Pastoral care should display patience, modesty, and genuine care toward families. They should foster a welcoming and understanding environment.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Background

The landscapes, compositions, and dynamics of families have changed in recent years. For instance, the social, economic, and political forces that shaped perceptions of family and the lived realities themselves as restructured expectations and traditions have shifted. Such modern challenges in spiritual care will not be adequately addressed unless this is traced back to historic moments when families were turning from traditional patterns into diversity. Four million African Americans left the US South over three decades between 1940 and 1970 in what came to be known as the Great Migration after fleeing from Jim Crow, which severely restricted their rights to move with freedom socially, politically, or economically¹. “They settle in urban areas where racial hierarchies were less pronounced.” The mighty impacts of slavery and the Great Migration should serve as ratings for an expedition in history, analyzing how these two have influenced society over generations.

¹ Ellora Derenoncourt, “Can you move to opportunity? Evidence from the Great Migration,” *American Economic Review* 112, no. 2 (2022): 369-370.

The “Great Migration” era left indelible impressions on the idea of family, which showed that difficult circumstances made many families non-Christians. By scrutinizing these historical antecedents, the aim here is to establish a foundation for addressing contemporary challenges in pastoral care, particularly concerning the diverse forms of families. Families have traditionally been viewed as the building blocks upon which communities are founded.² However, the composition and roles within families have never been static. Through evolving eras, kinships have organically evolved and morphed in reaction to changing environments. While contemporary family forms have diversified, with single parents, blended relationships, like-sex pairings, and multigenerational ties now part of the social fabric, traditional nuclear structures persist as one strand among the many interwoven threads comprising modern society’s tapestry. Understanding how these non-traditional family structures came into being requires a historical lens considering the forces that have shaped them.

The problem statement for my context is that my church currently experiences difficulty ministering to families because it possesses an antiquated understanding of what constitutes a family. This is due to the failure to distinguish between traditional and modern family and address their needs effectively. The traditional view of the family typically adheres to a nuclear structure consisting of a heterosexual couple and their biological children, which may not accurately represent the diverse family structures in

² Annette Woodroffe and Mavis Spencer, “Culturally and ethnically diverse communities: Building blocks for working relationships,” *Child Welfare* (2003): 176.

today's society. John Witte,³ Martin Luther,⁴ Heinrich Bullinger,⁵ and Martin Bucer⁶ emphasized the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional partnership between husbands and wives. John Witte urged mutual respect, support, and attention to each other's needs, endorsing wives pursuing careers.⁷

We now live in an era where family structures have become increasingly diverse, encompassing single parents, blended families, same-sex partners, and multiple generations under one roof, rigidly clinging to preconceived norms while alienating congregants by failing to appreciate the full variety of lived experiences and providing assistance attuned to present-day needs.⁸ An antiquated understanding of family may unintentionally perpetuate stigmatization and marginalization within the church. Those in a congregation who do not fit within the conventional vision of a household may perceive themselves as living on the edges or overlooked by their religious group.⁹ There is a feeling of isolation and losing touch in modern churches, which hamper one's spiritual

³ John Witte, *Church, state, and family: reconciling traditional teachings and modern liberties* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 72.

⁴ Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "Martin Luther on Marriage and the Family," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. John Barton (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3-4.

⁵ Carrie Euler, "Heinrich Bullinger, Marriage, and the English Reformation: 'The Christen State of Matrimonye' in England, 1540-53," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* (2003): 367-393, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.2307/20061414>.

⁶ Marijn De Kroon, "Martin Bucer and the Problem of Tolerance," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* (1988): 163.

⁷ Witte, *Church, state, and family*, 72-73.

⁸ Ann-Marie Desmond, "The double bind for non-traditional families in post-primary settings; to tell or not to tell their family identity," PhD diss., University College Cork, 2014, 12.

⁹ Annette Mahoney and Elizabeth J. Krumrei, "Questions left unaddressed by religious familism: Is spirituality relevant to non-traditional families," *The Oxford Handbook of the Psychology of Spirituality*, ed. Lisa J. Miller (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012): 125-126.

progression within the congregation as disengaging risks inhibiting their development and involvement in the religious community as society gets affected by divorce, cohabitation, and other non-traditional structures.¹⁰

As church leaders grapple with the complexities of diverse family forms in the 21st century, it has been evident that our forefathers have experienced the same throughout history and undertaking this knowledge would equip the ministers with historical insights to handle similar cases. Therefore, this historical foundation chapter explores the antecedents of non-traditional families during the Great Migration period (1916–1970) to provide a foundational understanding for addressing contemporary pastoral care challenges.¹¹ This research lays the groundwork for the anticipated DMin project and the problem in the church today, where empowering church leaders with a modern understanding of “family” is paramount for effective pastoral care in today’s society and by uncovering roots of non-traditional families and their enduring relevance in our modern world.

Purpose

This section aims to conduct a comprehensive historical examination of how families have evolved and been impacted during two significant historical periods — the Great Migration and the era of slavery.

¹⁰ Dale Appleby, “The Christian Family in the Modern World,” Dale Appleby, 2023, <https://www.daleappleby.net/index.php/theology-and-church/149-the-christian-family-in-the-modern-world#:~:text=The%20parents%20act%20like%20priests,life%20of%20God%20for%20them>.

¹¹ Steven A. Reich, “The great migration and the literary imagination,” *The Journal of the Historical Society* 9, no. 1 (2009): 87.

Objectives

- a) Investigating the Historical Impact of the Great Migration and Slavery on Family Structures. This objective involves an in-depth exploration and analysis of how the Great Migration and the era of slavery influenced family structures, with a specific focus on their historical context.
- b) Identifying Key Factors Shaping Family Dynamics during the Great Migration and Slavery. This objective aims to identify critical factors such as geographical dispersal, economic shifts, social changes, and the trauma of forced separation that pivotally reshaped families during the Great Migration and slavery.
- c) Enhancing Understanding of Modern Non-Traditional Family Compositions. This objective seeks to shed light on the complex nature of contemporary familial compositions, fostering a deeper comprehension of the challenges unconventional families face today.
- d) Empowering Church Leaders and Pastoral Caregivers with Historical Insights. This objective is designed to provide historical knowledge and insights to church leaders, enabling them to offer more inclusive, empathetic, and effective pastoral care to congregants with diverse family structures.

Hypothesis

“If leadership within the context participated in a symposium on the dynamics of family in the 21st century, then they will be equipped to come away with skills that will help them minister to the needs of the unique family dynamics found in my context.”

The Great Migration (1916-1970)

What is the Great Migration?

The “Great Migration” was one of the most significant population movements in American history, especially regarding African Americans uprooting themselves from anywhere between 1905 and nearly into the middle of the midcentury.¹² From 1916 to 1970, hundreds of thousands of African Americans moved away from the rural South to acquire better facilities laid down by their northern and mid-west submissions.¹³ In the Great Migration, African American people from these sides underwent various challenges and discrimination that ranged from system racism to economic alienation, including segregation, among others.¹⁴ These factors, aggravated by the promise of better economic fortunes and an enhanced level of civil rights in the North, comprised incentives for their emigration.

The Great Migration transformed the geography of African Americans in the United States, mainly through its most significant urban areas such as Chicago. With unprecedented increases found among their black populaces, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia, demographers explored patterns with census statistics to find evidence under contradictory views about whether blacks migrated towards northern cities between 1906-28 or steady outward migration prevailed.¹⁵

¹² Reich, “The great migration and the literary imagination,” 2-4.

¹³ Reich, “The great migration and the literary imagination,” 2-4.

¹⁴ Stewart E. Tolnay, “The African American ‘great migration’ and beyond,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2003): 227-228.

¹⁵ Ellora Derenoncourt, “Can you move to opportunity? Evidence from the Great Migration,” *American Economic Review* 112, no. 2 (2022): 373-377.

Secondly, the Great Migration contributed to a vital element in developing the civil rights movement, namely by bringing together African Americans in cities, which provided for feelings of cohesion that brought more pressure on equality and social change.¹⁶ Therefore, the Great Migration was an essential event in history belonging to America marked by mass migration from the rural South, where most African Americans lived; they essentially transferred to the urban North and Midwest where financial powers dominated developments; there were social and political elements, also called other aspects, which led to dramatic demographic change.

Causes and Drivers of Migration

During this time, America underwent tremendous migration, which came to be called the Great Migration (from 1916 to 1970). African Americans migrated from rural South to urban North and West for economic, social, and political reasons,¹⁷ Those fleeing oppressive racial conditions in the rural South sought better opportunities in the urban North, as millions of African Americans migrated to escape the injustices they faced. This mass migration altered the very fabric of family life for those involved. Wilkerson's seminal work intricately traces the journeys of three individuals who embarked on this transformative migration. This allows us to deeply grasp its profound impact through the meticulous chronicling in *The Warmth of Other Suns* of their transformational experiences undertaken during this historical period.¹⁸ Their stories

¹⁶ Tolnay, "The African American 'great migration' and beyond," 227-228.

¹⁷ Alicia Davis and Greg Wiggan, "Black Education and the Great Migration," *Black History Bulletin* 81, no. 2 (2018):12.

vividly depict the disruptions and reconfigurations of family structures as they pursued the promise of a more equitable future.

One key theme in Wilkerson's narrative is the physical separation of family members due to migration.¹⁹ In search of work and an escape from the racial divides that plagued the South, many lived apart in differing cities and sometimes across entire regions, seeking what they desired most. This geographical dispersal challenged traditional family roles and dynamics. Spouses and children were left behind, while others forged new family bonds in unfamiliar urban environments. The bonds of kinship endured, but the physical proximity and day-to-day interactions that defined traditional family life were irrevocably altered. Comprehending the origins and motivations behind this historical event hinges upon Isabel Wilkerson's extensive treatise *The Warmth of Other Suns*.²⁰

Economic Factors

Better employment prospects drove the Great Migration with one key factor being the appeal of job opportunities in the North. Jobs that offered good pay were sparse for African Americans living in the South due to racism.²¹ Home departure was triggered by enticements like higher wages, enhanced job conditions, and freedom from farm tenancy.

¹⁸ W. O. O. S. Wilkerson, *Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), 8-9.

¹⁹ Wilkerson, *Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns*, 260-265.

²⁰ Wilkerson, *Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns*, 260-265.

²¹ Menika Belicia Dirkson, *Hope and Struggle in the Policed Inner-City: Black Criminalization and Racial Capitalism in Philadelphia, 1914-1978* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2021), 20-21.

Pushed by an economic force, the migration began. The promise of better economic prospects in the North was a significant driver of migration. African Americans residing in the southern region of the United States historically encountered constrained prospects of employment and meager financial compensation as a direct consequence of the widespread prejudicial treatment of their race.²² The rapid industrialization of Northern factories simultaneously presented escaping Southerners with the tempting prospects of gainful employment in industries like manufacturing and steel mills that dangled the enticing carrots of better wages and living standards than what they had previously known. One of the individuals who migrated Richard Wright said, “Timidly we get off the train. We hug our suitcases, fearful of pickpockets . . . We are very reserved, for we have been warned not to act green. We board our first Yankee streetcar to go a cousin’s home. We have been told that we can sit where we please, but we are still scared. We cannot shake off three hundred years of fear in three hours.”²³

Moreover, those denied the basic right to vote and often facing threats from white supremacists in the politically oppressive Southern states sought ways to evade such an inhospitable climate through their search for empowerment and participation in the democratic process.²⁴ The people of the North held high hopes that by separating from the South, they could attain more liberty in self-governance along with an increased say on matters of the community.

²² Wilkerson, *Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns*, 225.

²³ Wilkerson, *Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns*, 209-211.

²⁴ Wilkerson, *Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns*, 209-211.

Social Factors

During this time in the South, segregation, racial violence, and the oppressive Jim Crow laws defined the social terrain. Also, fleeing the oppressive Jim Crow laws and the racism of the Southern United States that discriminated daily, the driving force behind the Great Migration of many African Americans, was the desire to escape this unjust treatment and seek freedom elsewhere.²⁵ Racial segregation severely limited economic opportunities and risked violence for African Americans in the Southern states.²⁶ A fervent longing to break free from the inequitable restraints of this racist regime drove numerous individuals North in search of improved conditions where formal divisions between races were less stringent, and the potential for prosperity appeared greater.

Moreover, racial discrimination and violence were an everyday reality for many African Americans.²⁷ A more equitable and accessible lifestyle motivated mass migration during the Great Migration period. Intending to give their young ones a superior way of living, families fled the South. Social factors included family reunification, education and access to services, perception of other freedom, and push factors from the South. Families were often separated due to economic necessity and the migration patterns of the time. To escape limited opportunities in the South, many African Americans ventured away from their families in search of work in northern cities. Reuniting with loved ones and creating stable family structures significantly motivated migration.

²⁵ Wilkerson, *Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns*, 199-200.

²⁶ Wilkerson, *Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns*, 199-200.

²⁷ Troy Landrum Jr, *Dreaming of the Great Migration* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2021), 36.

Political Factors

Migrations were likewise influenced by the political situation at the time. With the surge of racial tension during the early 20th century, the Ku Klux Klan rose again, along with the resurgence of white supremacy throughout the South.²⁸ Legal safeguards for African Americans being insufficient and racial aggression going unchecked drove people to search for security and parity elsewhere. Attractive was the promise of political liberty and voting rights in the North. The North offered better access to education and services for African Americans, including healthcare and social services. These drove many families to migrate, seeking a better future for their children and improved access to essential resources. There was a perception among African Americans that the North represented greater freedom and opportunities, both economically and socially.²⁹ This perception found further credence through tales recounted by others who had previously braved the journey in a northerly direction.

Information about opportunities in the North spread through informal networks and word of mouth. Friends and family who had successfully migrated would encourage others to follow suit, creating a chain migration effect. Alongside the pull factors of the North, there were also push factors from the South, including the boll weevil infestation, which devastated cotton crops, and recurring agricultural crises that made life in the South increasingly untenable.

²⁸ Janice H. Hammond, A. Kamau Massey, and Mayra A. Garza, "African American Inequality in the United States," *Harvard Business School* (2020): 2-4.

²⁹ Wilkerson, *Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns*, 36-39.

Impact on Family Structure

Profound changes occurred to family structures that brought about the Great Migration. Investigating the division of families caused by migration helps us grasp how complicated this demographic alteration is. The following presents the impact of family structures.

Separation of Families

During the northward voyage, geography separated families. While leaving his wife and children behind in the South, a husband migrates to a Northern city for work opportunities. Ellora Derenoncourt's study provides valuable insights into the Great Migration's impact on Black families and its implications for racial upward mobility.³⁰ Her research adds a nuanced perspective to the historical context of the Great Migration, which can be integrated into the discussion of this period. During the era of the Great Migration from the rural South to opportunities in the northern United States, this study examines when millions of Black people moved northward, seeking improved economic prospects and to avoid the repressive racism that plagued the South.³¹ This migration wave significantly reshaped the demographic composition of the United States' northern and southern regions.

Derenoncourt's research highlights a crucial aspect of the Great Migration's consequences. She demonstrates that "racial composition shocks" during this period harmed Black families' prospects for upward mobility in the North. This finding is

³⁰ Derenoncourt, "Can you move to opportunity? Evidence from the Great Migration," 369.

³¹ Derenoncourt, "Can you move to opportunity? Evidence from the Great Migration," 372.

essential for understanding the historical experiences of Black families during this era. Though the Great Migration promised better living standards and financial prospects, the truth demonstrated that reality held more intricacies than initial expectations portrayed. Physical separation forced partners and their young ones to get accustomed to novel domiciles, uprooting long-cherished family conventions.³²

One of Derenoncourt's key findings is that these racial composition shocks during the Great Migration can explain a significant portion (twenty-seven percent) of the contemporary racial upward mobility gap.³³ This finding indicates that the consequences of the Great Migration continue to influence the socioeconomic disparities Black families face today.³⁴ Derenoncourt also explores the mechanisms behind these findings. She argues that it was not the negative selection of families but rather locational changes that explain lower upward mobility. Factors such as persistent segregation, increased crime, and policing in certain northern areas shaped the outcomes for Black families.³⁵ Traditional family bonds stayed strong despite distance breaking their close physical bond.

Changing Dynamics

Adjusting to urban life in the North, families were introduced to new dynamics. Living closely with others, families formed new support networks that stretched their

³² Rachel L. Swarns, *The 272* (New York, NY: Random House, 2023), 138-139.

³³ Derenoncourt, "Can you move to opportunity? Evidence from the Great Migration," 400.

³⁴ Oscar Handlin, *The uprooted: The epic story of the great migrations that made the American people* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 48.

³⁵ Derenoncourt, "Can you move to opportunity? Evidence from the Great Migration," 405.

perception of family. With increased reliance on extended families and communities, support and connection were found through shared hardship.³⁶ Displaying remarkable adaptability and tenacity, these African American family structures were on full display during a crucial moment in history. While the Great Migration reshaped families through voluntary migration, the era of slavery cast an even darker shadow on the concept of family.

The dark chapter of slavery in American history decimated the ability of enslaved African Americans to establish stable familial bonds and structures, fundamentally impacting how their family formation was sustained for generations to come.³⁷ In this context, one source that stands out is *The 272*, which exposes the complicity of the Catholic Church in slavery, including the separation of enslaved families.³⁸ This revelation underscores the brutality of the institution and its enduring impact on African American family structures. Furthermore, John A. Williams argues that just as African American soldiers in the United States were redefining their roles within families and communities during a time of significant social change, the movements in Germany explored in the book also sought to challenge traditional values.³⁹ They looked to nature as a means of reevaluating and, in some cases, breaking free from conventional norms

³⁶ Donna L. Franklin and Angela D. James, *Ensuring inequality: The structural transformation of the African American family* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 16.

³⁷ Grant Rodwell, *The Power of Neo-Slave Fiction and Public History: From Slavery to the Enslaved* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2023), 15.

³⁸ Terry Gross, “The Catholic Church Profited from Slavery - ‘the 272’ Explains How,” NPR, June 13, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/13/1181767635/the-272-catholic-church-rachel-swarns-slavery-georgetown>.

³⁹ J. A. Williams, *Turning to nature in Germany: hiking, nudism, and conservation, 1900-1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 32.

and societal constraints. It offers a rare and poignant glimpse into the lives of enslaved individuals. The firsthand accounts vividly portray the gut-wrenching ordeals endured by families broken asunder, frequently by the capricious devices of their owners who held them in bondage. The stories within these pages bear witness to the resilience and determination of enslaved individuals to preserve their family bonds in the face of unspeakable cruelty.

From an introspective lens, does one begin to grasp the profound ancestral foundations of the non-traditional African American household model and its continuing influence upon modern society?⁴⁰ Therefore, the historical context of families and their evolution into non-traditional structures is an essential lens to understand contemporary pastoral care challenges. The Great Migration and the era of slavery represent two monumental periods in American history that have left indelible marks on the concept of family. The Great Migration transformed family dynamics through voluntary migration, geographical dispersal, and shifting societal norms. On the other hand, the era of slavery cast a grim shadow, where enslaved families endured forced separation and brutality yet demonstrated remarkable resilience.

The Role of Historical Understanding and the DMin Project

Many African Americans relocated from the rural South to the urban North during the Great Migration for various reasons. Economic opportunities in Northern cities were a major draw with promises of better-paying jobs and improved living conditions; however, this often-meant family separations as individuals moved ahead to secure work

⁴⁰ Swarns, *The* 272, 82-83.

and housing, leaving their families behind temporarily. The implications of this included strained family dynamics due to the physical distance and emotional toll of separation.⁴¹ Additionally, the migration disrupted traditional family structures as women and children often followed later, and extended families sometimes lived together to make ends meet.

While economic gains were significant, the Great Migration also underscored the sacrifices and challenges African American families faced during this transformative period in American history. Informed and empathetic care hinges on an awareness of the history that church leaders and pastoral caregivers share. Pastoral practitioners can better address contemporary challenges with increased sensitivity and efficiency by understanding the historical roots of non-traditional family structures.⁴² Examining how families adapted during the Great Migration may give insight into fostering varied family arrangements today.

Moreover, within the DMin project, historical understanding offers a crucial context for future research. Recognition of historical influences enables researchers to craft investigations tailored to real congregational life. The DMin project aims to build upon the established history, which includes fostering inclusivity within the faith community by developing educational resources and materials, enhancing pastoral care by providing targeted support to diverse flock members via trained leaders, and strengthening community bonds.

A historically informed perspective allows church leaders to tackle modern-day religious challenges through workshops, symposiums, and training sessions. The church

⁴¹ Swarns, *The 272*, 94.

⁴² Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 56.

may bolster communal links, ensuring that all congregation members feel worthwhile and accepted based only on their family setup will be accomplished. Therefore, the Great Migration reached a vital conclusion driven by economic, social, and political considerations.

The Era of Slavery and Its Legacy

Families Enslaved and the Catholic Church

A dark stain on American history, the enslavement of Africans led to their dehumanization and exploitation. Crucial to understanding the experience of enslaved families is investigating the function of religion, particularly the Catholic Church, as it provides valuable insight into collaborations between the Catholic Church and slavery.⁴³ For instance, the enslaved people relied on the Catholic Church for spiritual comfort and direction; unfortunately, this institution often supported the slavery system instead.⁴⁴ Georgetown University and other Catholic establishments have enjoyed financial gain from the buying and selling of enslaved people during times past.⁴⁵ Church teachings were at odds with financial aid provided by slave traders, causing immense harm to enslaved family members.

Moreover, slavery had significant implications for the Catholic Church and enslaved families. Slavery brought chaos to family ties and saw the Church play an active

⁴³ Gross, “The Catholic Church Profited from Slavery.”

⁴⁴ Franklin and James, *Ensuring inequality*, 78.

⁴⁵ Gross, “The Catholic Church Profited from Slavery.”

role in tearing loved ones apart.⁴⁶ With the loss of their loved ones and families, including husbands, wives, and children, they have experienced the agony of being forced apart, sold to separate owners, and enduring incomprehensible hardships.⁴⁷ For many enslaved families, the church, instead of being a place of spiritual solace, became a

The Fragmentation of Enslaved Families

Through the separation of enslaved family members, we witness the deplorable consequences of slavery. Some of these consequences included forced separations, psychological toll, and legacy fragmentation. Even to this day, there seems to be fragmentation in families that trace back to slavery.

Forced Separations

Enslaved families were separated by the very foundation of slavery. With discretionary powers, slaveholders could separate families, forcing loved ones to be sold apart. From their children, parents were torn apart, which was an ingrained cruelty that led to immense suffering for those held captive and enduring psychological damage that persists across generations. The detailed examination in Le'Trice D. Donaldson's book, *Beyond The Battlefield*, explores how African American soldiers actively participated in and spearheaded the advancement of racial uplift, citizenship, and manhood throughout the post-Civil War era.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, An Imprint of The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2021), 22.

⁴⁷ Gross, "The Catholic Church Profited from Slavery."

Historical context gives deeper meaning to recurring civil rights and social justice themes in the ongoing struggle showing potential relevance when ministering to community and family needs within the African American experience through pastoral and development initiatives that facilitate change. For instance, forced separation is featured in Donaldson's book which focuses on racial uplift. He argues that military service could uplift the image of their race. They aimed to demonstrate their competence, patriotism, and moral character to challenge prevailing stereotypes of Black inferiority. This aligns with Donaldson's argument that African American soldiers sought to contribute to racial uplift through their military service and activism and efforts to redefine the perception of Black Americans in society.

Psychological Toll

Donaldson's book, *Beyond the Battlefield*, provides an intimate look at the emotional and psychological effects of family separation caused by slavery. Donaldson explores how African American soldiers grappled with questions of manhood and identity in the face of societal expectations and discrimination.⁴⁹ The men endeavored to reshape how Blackness and masculinity were perceived in their towns, aiming at a culture that habitually deprived them of their God-given rights as people while necessarily recalibrating the images of self and community from within. They challenged prevailing stereotypes and contributed to reshaping the perception of Black manhood. Exploring this

⁴⁸ Le'Trice D. Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield: African American Soldiers Fight for Racial Uplift, Citizenship, and Manhood, 1870-1920* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2020), 12.

⁴⁹ Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield*, 18.

deeper historical context underscores how these resonant themes meaningfully echoed the broader national quest for equity and human dignity so pertinent when deliberating on spiritual care, communal uplift, and societal evolution amid African American kinship networks and neighborhoods.⁵⁰ Through their stories, we see the agony and sadness that came with the constant fear of being torn apart. The weight of fearing the loss of loved ones and helplessly watching them leave hit harder than anything else.

Legacy of Fragmentation

A continuing legacy of family fragmentation was brought about by slavery. Continuing to face the consequences of historical trauma, many African American families navigate today. Frederick Douglass's autobiographical writings in *The Complete Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass* not only profoundly depict his harrowing experiences of enduring cruelty, being forcibly separated from loved ones while constantly striving for education and liberty against immense adversity, but also provide piercing insights into the barbarism of the system of slavery, the trauma resulting from compelled family division, and the relentless efforts and aspirations of enslaved African Americans to attain freedom and self-rule.⁵¹

Through his prolific writings, he vigorously championed eradicating systemic racism and discrimination continuing to afflict African American families in their communities, highlighting his steadfast advocacy for civil rights. Beyond his journey, Douglass worked to influence the landscape of post-slavery America by vocally

⁵⁰ Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield*, 18.

⁵¹ Frederick Douglass, *The Complete Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 39.

championing civil liberties and prospects denied African Americans throughout their bondage, seeking equality for all people regardless of race. His life and works endure through the abiding lesson of resilience and resolve. He stands up for injustice and in defiance repeatedly. Within the African American community, understanding the legacy is essential in grasping how non-traditional family structures came about through responses to historical difficulties brought by slavery.

Legacy, Historical Context, and the DMin Project

Historical knowledge is vital to tackling us, recognizing the lasting results of slavery, and basing future study and pastoral work on that knowledge. For instance, without knowing how historical religious institutions separated families during slavery, we cannot understand modern issues experienced by African American families adequately. Historical trauma has only spurred African American families to reinvent themselves once more. Also informing modern-day research is the historical legacy of slavery concerning the intricacies of family dynamics within the African American community. A researcher can design studies for leaders in the church to assist the pastor in addressing non-traditional family structures by addressing current pastoral care challenges while acknowledging their historical roots. Historical knowledge allows pastors and leaders in the church to assist the pastor in offering compassionate, culture-sensitive care to congregations. By recognizing the impact on enslaved people and their families, religious leaders can help by supporting healing and strengthening individuals and families.

The DMin project will delve into the influence of history, specifically regarding how slavery has affected modern shepherding like healing and reconciliation, whereby tackling the historical trauma experienced by African Americans. This DMin venture looks to stimulate healing and restoration across the religious group. Exploring and healing from the impact of family fragmentation brought about by slavery, workshops, dialogues, and educational programs aim to create a space for congregations. Also, through cultural competency, which aims to improve cultural understanding, the project addresses the lingering effects of slavery. With this aim in mind, the pastoral support staff has created instructional materials and tools to help them better serve individuals from distinct ancestral foundations. Through the DMin project, the goal is to reinforce family relationships rooted in the historical endurance of African American families. Creating a haven for individuals from divergent domestic circumstances, the church works towards establishing inclusivity and belonging. Therefore, that tragic legacy is a sad reminder that slavery left behind, including shattered household bonds. Comprehension of these factors is vital if one wishes to gain an insight into the difficulties experienced by Black families nowadays.

Other Migration Periods and Resulting Shifts

Jewish Migration and Family Adaptations

Significant historic adaptation examples exist within Jewish migration spanning 1880 to 1920.⁵² By examining family migrations, we gain a valuable understanding of resilience and adaptability in the face of change. Again, families play a role in supporting other family members in this migration.

Jewish Migration Experience

Eastern European Jewish migration saw an enormous surge during the late 19th and early 20th centuries with most moving to America.⁵³ Political turmoil, financial difficulties, and anti-Semitism pushed Jewish households to migrate to the United States. For this migration, economic opportunities and religious freedom served as powerful incentives. Nicholas Lemann's *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*, further enriches our understanding of this historical period.⁵⁴

Lemann delves into the broader societal changes that accompanied the Great Migration, including shifts in gender roles and expectations. As African Americans moved to urban centers, new family models emerged.⁵⁵ These models emphasized self-

⁵² Hasia R. Diner, "East European Jews in America, 1880-1920: Immigration and Adaptation," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 3 (1999): 92-96.

⁵³ Eli Lederhendler, "Jewish immigrants and American capitalism, 1880-1920," *From caste to class* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 109.

⁵⁴ Don Wycliff, "Northern Bound--The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America by Nicholas Lemann," *Commonweal* 118, no. 10 (1991): 332.

⁵⁵ Lederhendler, "Jewish immigrants and American capitalism, 1880-1920," 110.

reliance, community support networks, and adaptability. Due in part to the demands of city living during a period of immense social change, a growing proliferation of nonconforming familial structures diverged from prevailing norms, bringing difficulties and prospective benefits to those navigating the evolving complexities of urban community.⁵⁶

Adaptation to New Circumstances

Immigrant families faced the difficult task of acclimating to their new surroundings upon arriving in the United States. Linguistic, cultural, and social obstacles demanded new network formation and role redesign.⁵⁷ Integration was accomplished during this time despite challenges by demonstrating the resolve of Jewish families to preserve their cultural and religious identity.

African American Migration Westward

Changing circumstances gave rise to new family dynamic patterns among African American migrants in the West. The Black Exodus, also known as this migration, reveals how related materials like “Black Exodus” provide insight into the intricacies of migrations.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lawrence J. Epstein, *At the Edge of a Dream: The Story of Jewish Immigrants on New York's Lower East Side, 1880-1920* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 27.

⁵⁷ Charles Hirschman and Elizabeth Mogford, “Immigration and the American Industrial Revolution from 1880 to 1920,” *Social Science Research* 38, no. 4 (2009): 920.

⁵⁸ Alferdteen Harrison, ed., *Black exodus: The great migration from the American south* (Oxford, MS: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1991), 92.

African American Migration Westward

Western states were where many African Americans relocated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to migration. Away from the oppression of racial segregation and violence in the South, this migration was also spurred on by the hope of finding better financial prospects in the West. Donaldson's assertion that African American soldiers played a crucial role in advancing the cause of full citizenship for themselves and their communities indicates the relevance of families.⁵⁹ Their efforts contributed to the broader struggle for civil rights. Donaldson's book emphasizes how African American soldiers viewed military service as a pathway to full citizenship rights. They saw their service as a claim to equal citizenship and used their experiences to advocate for political and civil rights.

Unique Family Dynamics

From the migrations westward stemmed the formation of specialized family dynamics as seen in African Americans. Predominantly white communities were where families usually established themselves as a minority.⁶⁰ Here, opportunities faced stiff competition from challenges. Navigating racial tensions and discrimination required families to build networks and connections, leveraging their strength and adaptability.

⁵⁹ Donaldson, *Duty Beyond the Battlefield*, 22.

⁶⁰ Franklin and James, *Ensuring inequality*, 51.

Role of African American Churches

The critical function that African American churches served in the Black Exodus was to help shape and sustain family ties.⁶¹ They helped families settle into their new lives in the West by providing spiritual guidance, communities, and social support. Non-traditional circumstances call for the adaptation skills of religious institutions.

Preservation of Cultural Identity

Cultural identity and heritage were fiercely protected by African American families despite the challenges. Artistic expressions helped preserve heritage while building social bonds among family and friends.⁶² How families adapt to new circumstances and traditional roles redefined when migrating West offers compelling insights historically. Through resilience, resourcefulness, and adaptability, families respond effectively to challenges and opportunities. Examining historical records allows us to appreciate the richness and versatility of family structures across time, shedding light on relevant pastoral care methods today.

Conclusion

A historical analysis of the Great Migration and slavery has underscored the immense value of grasping the progression of atypical family units. As demonstrated through this investigation, non-traditional family structures have long been an integral part of history, disproving the notion that they originated in recent times. This historical

⁶¹ Harrison, *Black exodus*, 93.

⁶² James N. Gregory, *The southern diaspora: How the great migrations of black and white southerners transformed America* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2006), 17-19.

context deepens our grasp of family dynamics and supplies 21st-century church leaders with vital instruments to advance an expanded perspective on the “family.” Building on this extensive historical analysis, one can develop a more caring and practical way of providing pastoral support to non-traditional families inside the church.

The practices of families among African Americans later became insubordination at times in and after the Great Migration. Eventually, neutering was a systemic adaptation to the disruptions with large-scale networks and new normative interpretations that remained throughout this time. Although violence associated with the former slavery era as these families transformed and challenged their lives, even though the ethnicity of the ancestral village with some hints of pride seeking boundaries to this family’s group still, their existence allows links between generations. As a result of the Western Black Exodus, the abnormal families emerged from which almost escaped strange beliefs in the black church; those gifts provided peace and acceptance through revelation despite conflicts. However, African American families were persistent enough to assimilate changes, and with heavy loads of assumptions under unpleasant circumstances, they showed unity.

The African American families have become the new mirrors of changing perceptions regarding a traditional nuclear family pattern. The history is clear that such families have a lengthy background from slavery to the outlaw of segregation. Influenced by economic, social, and political variables throughout multiple ages, they reveal huge adaptational potentials. Accepting different family frameworks inside the church collective, this parameter problematizes any thought of a singular conventional kin structure.

This historical basis undermines religious leaders and others who can solve problems of the “problem statement” (of this doctoral thesis) through revolutionary solutions. A much more inclusive and progressive attitude can be adopted by substituting an old-fashioned view of family within the church. The resilience of non-traditional families is a way to inform pastoral care practices, and church leaders can look at it for clarity. Understanding how families have been transformed speaks directly to creating a welcoming and comfortable environment. As the DMin initiative creeps in, monumental strength lies within defining how pastors minister and care ahead.

This study informs the project’s fundamental goals and principles. For instance, non-traditional families will benefit from an improved pastoral care approach that values inclusivity, compassion, and stronger relationships thanks to the DMin initiative. According to this study, non-traditional families have shown remarkable endurance. Providing biblical counselling and compassionate and relevant pastoral care to diverse congregations requires knowledge and empathy gained through dispelling misconceptions about family structures. Across the ages, the church community bonds of resilience and adaptability form an invitation to embrace our diverse heritage. Embarking upon the DMin project, lessons learned from history guide our path forward where all family structures find solace, support, and belonging.

From these findings, we recommend that churches need to organize a symposium to address contemporary family structures’ evolving nature. My church, among others, should conduct a symposium or workshop whose theme would be the one being discussed. This symposium brings together esteemed panelists from diverse fields to facilitate high-quality informed professionals among individuals in clinical and

professional positions to elucidate the evolving nature of family structures in modern society. This symposium desires to receive an open invitation from members and leaders in churches and the communities around for a fraternal dialogue on those who benefit since no one should be ignored. With such an attitude, the church could generate inclusion to enable various contradictory views and provide a setting where imminent ideas and subjectivities surrounding the family can be freely discussed.

Next, we should examine historical education. Weaving historical insights into the church's educational programs is an invaluable opportunity. One can also think of engaging guest speakers or staging seminars that reflect on the historical development of how families were structured, taking as a starting point from the thorough history of The Great Migration and its impact upon enslaved family living. Further, as highlighted by the project mentioned above, access to proper books and related resources can ensure that fans will read more of such things.

Third, pastoral training programs must be initiated to help church leaders and pastors' staff be sufficiently trained to serve non-traditional families; separate sessions must be run in such a way. These sessions should focus on vital skills such as empathy, active listening, and culturally appropriate practices. Promoting open conversations between church leaders and families with different structures will provide insights into their peculiar requirements.

An essential church practice that needs updating is language and practice to ensure a welcoming way with a family orientation. Developing support networks are vital in making sermons, teachings, and communications within the church sensitive to the family structures in members' congregations. Leaders should be careful about assuming

that a traditional family is only based on what is commonly seen and always makes do with language and implementation procedures that feature this broader connotation.

Alternative support groups should be developed within the church distinct from particular family configurations where families could connect irrespective of their makeup. Perhaps organizing small or affinity groups that meet the needs of different types of families individually would be a great idea. Notably, these networks can become places where families can meet face to face and share their stories, which will encourage one another, building togetherness within the church.

Finally, extending the church's outreach efforts to help families from the wider community effectively show the divine house's commitment toward all concerned with family issues is imperative. Such needs can be easily determined and satisfied by establishing closer cooperation with area providers, aid agencies, and grassroots coalitions attached to nonstandard family structures. This outreach enables the practical demonstration of church inclusivity and commitment to societal engagement. With the implementation of these robust suggestions, my church will be an active agent promoting a more attuned and contemporary conceptualization of family in today's age.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Background

Flexibility and responsiveness are essential traits in the dynamic ministry as communities face evolving challenges. Pastoral care is a subset of Practical Theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher is credited with establishing practical theology as a discipline of theological studies. He felt practical theology should be grounded on a larger understanding of Christianity in contemporary society. “Practical theology seamlessly integrates faith with the practical realities encountered in ministry contexts. Practical Theology is a bridge between theory and practice. Practical Theology is one of the fields that draw upon the concerns and resources of others.¹”

“The term pastoral care comes from the Latin [*Pastorem*], meaning shepherd, and includes in its deep etymology the notion of tending to the needs of the vulnerable. The Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament scriptures were the products of pastoral societies. Jesus was the good Shepherd, the church his flock. In the early history of the

¹ David Willows and John Swinton, *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care: Practical Theology in a Multidisciplinary Context* (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000), 28.

church, Christian leaders took on the metaphoric role and identity of the shepherd, caring for the members of their congregations as a shepherd tends to his sheep.²

This chapter explores practical theology's pivotal role in addressing contemporary challenges, specifically emphasizing its application within family ministry.³ As churches navigate the complexities of modern society, practical theology emerges as a robust framework for engaging with real-world issues, infusing theological depth and pastoral insight into the fabric of congregational life. The evolving nature of family structures in the 21st century presents unseen dynamic challenges.⁴ Once rooted in stable family units, traditional ministry models now grapple with the complexities of blended families, single-parent households, and the pervasive influence of technology and social media. Practical theology is the conduit between theological principles and lived experiences, empowering ministers and church leaders to navigate these complexities with wisdom and compassion.⁵ Practical theology equips ministry leaders with the tools to address pressing concerns, nurture spiritual growth, and foster vibrant faith communities. Its relevance extends beyond mere theoretical discourse to a tangible response to the multifaceted realities of congregational life.

² Barbara McClure, *Pastoral Care*, The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology (Hoboken, NJ: A Wiley & Sons, LTD Publication, 2012), 269-278.

³ Tobias H. Steyn and Maake J. Masango, "The theology and praxis of practical theology in the context of the Faculty of Theology," *HTS: Theological Studies* 67, no. 2 (2011): 6.

⁴ Dale Appleby, "The Christian Family in the Modern World," Dale Appleby, 2023, 3, <https://www.daleappleby.net/index.php/theology-and-church/149-the-christian-family-in-the-modern-world#:~:text=The%20parents%20act%20like%20priests,life%20of%20God%20for%20them>.

⁵ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Toward greater understanding of practical theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16, no. 1 (2012): 112.

At the heart of the matter, it is necessary to integrate practical theology principles into family ministry, confronting contemporary pastoral care challenges head-on. The events of today's society demand responsive and holistic approaches to pastoral care, particularly within family dynamics.⁶ Pattison et al. argue that effective pastoral care within family ministry begins with a deep engagement with the principles of practical theology.⁷ This indicates that integrating faith and practice becomes desirable and indispensable; this chapter advocates for integrating practical theology as a dynamic and impactful strategy to meet the diverse needs of contemporary families. By embracing the transformative potential of practical theology, churches can chart a course toward a holistic ministry that authentically addresses the multifaceted needs of families, fostering environments of inclusion, empathy, and spiritual growth.

Statement of the Problem

The problem statement at hand delineates a critical challenge faced by our church: the struggle to effectively minister to families due to outdated understandings of family structures and inadequate pastoral care practices.⁸ The traditional perception of family, rooted in a nuclear structure, fails to encompass the diverse family configurations

⁶ Miller-McLemore, "Toward greater understanding of practical theology," 118.

⁷ Stephen Pattison and Gordon Lynch, "Pastoral and Practical Theology," *The Modern Theologians* 3 (2005): 416.

⁸ Annette Mahoney and Elizabeth J. Krumrei, "Questions left unaddressed by religious familism: Is spirituality relevant to non-traditional families," *The Oxford Handbook of the Psychology of Spirituality*, ed. Lisa J. Miller (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012): 178.

prevalent in modern society.⁹ As society evolves, embracing non-traditional family forms such as same-sex parent families, others, and multi-generational households, our church must adapt its pastoral care models to demonstrate God's love to these diverse families' unique needs and experiences.¹⁰ Failure to acknowledge and address the evolving dynamic of family structures risks alienating congregants and perpetuating feelings of marginalization within our religious community. The evolving nature of family dynamics demands a responsive and inclusive approach to pastoral care that transcends rigid adherence to antiquated norms.¹¹ As Witte and other reformers articulated, historical perspectives underscore the importance of mutual respect and support within spousal relationships, advocating for inclusivity and understanding in the face of diverse family structures. However, our church's failure to embrace these evolving realities may inadvertently perpetuate stigmatization and exclusion, hindering congregants' spiritual progression and engagement within our religious community. In navigating the complexities of diverse family forms, church leaders must draw upon historical insights and contemporary understandings to inform their pastoral care approaches.¹² By acknowledging the diverse lived experiences of congregants and fostering an environment of inclusivity and acceptance, our church can cultivate a sense of belonging

⁹ Dale Appleby, "The Christian Family in the Modern World," Dale Appleby, 2023, 3, <https://www.daleappleby.net/index.php/theology-and-church/149-the-christian-family-in-the-modern-world#:~:text=The%20parents%20act%20like%20priests,life%20of%20God%20for%20them>.

¹⁰ Ann-Marie Desmond, "The double bind for non-traditional families in post-primary settings; to tell or not to tell their family identity," PhD diss., University College Cork, 2014, 28.

¹¹ John Witte, *Church, state, and family: reconciling traditional teachings and modern liberties* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 72.

¹² Dale Appleby, "The Christian Family in the Modern World," Dale Appleby, 2023, 3.

and spiritual growth among all community members.¹³ Through intentional efforts to broaden our theological understanding of family life and enhance pastoral care practices, we can create a nurturing and welcoming environment that embraces our congregation's full spectrum of family diversity.

Purpose and Hypothesis

This doctoral thesis and project aim to demonstrate the transformative potential of integrating practical theology principles into family ministry, addressing contemporary pastoral care challenges and advocating for a theoretical and practical framework that enhances the effectiveness of ministering to families within the 21st-century church context. The hypothesis is that “if leadership within the context participated in a symposium on family dynamics in the 21st century, then they will be equipped to come away with skills that will help them minister to the needs of the unique family dynamics found in my context.”

Understanding Practical Theology and Its Role in Pastoral Care

Defining Practical Theology and Its Significance

Practical theology, a dynamic field within theological discourse, bridges abstract theological concepts and their practical implementation in real-world ministry contexts. Hans-Gunter Heimbrock's exploration of the empirical dimension of theology emphasizes the significance of lived experience and a life-world-oriented approach in

¹³ Mahoney and Krumrei, “Questions left unaddressed by religious familism,” 178.

contemporary theological discourse.¹⁴ Practical Theology as Empirical Theology is central to this understanding, highlighting the importance of reflective engagement with religious life within congregations and the broader Christian community. Practical theology shapes pastoral care practices by drawing on Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, emphasizing a holistic reflection, interpretation, and action process. In pastoral care, practical theology is critical because it contextualizes theological insights addressing the specific needs and challenges individuals and communities face.¹⁵ While “practical theology” may not be explicitly mentioned in Scripture, numerous verses underscore principles integral to its significance in pastoral care.¹⁶ These verses emphasize the inseparable link between faith and action, urging believers to translate their theological convictions into tangible expressions of care and compassion. Moreover, practical theology facilitates critical reflection on pastoral practices, prompting ongoing evaluation and innovation. Guillaume H. Smit’s examination of practical theology in South African congregations highlights the importance of narrative therapy and missional ecclesiology in fostering congregational change.¹⁷ This study advocates for a multi-disciplinary approach to pastoral care, incorporating elements of psychological therapy, organizational theory, crisis counseling, and personal growth. By engaging pastors in intentional faith formation and providing them with counseling skills and research methods, practical theology equips them to address complex pastoral challenges and

¹⁴ Hans-Günter Heimbrock, “Practical Theology as Empirical Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 14, no. 2 (2011): 156.

¹⁵ James 2:14-17.

¹⁶ Matthew 25:35-36.

¹⁷ Guillaume H. Smit, “Pastoral ministry in a missional age: Towards a practical theological understanding of missional pastoral care,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015): 1.

guide congregations toward holistic transformation. Ultimately, practical theology inspires action and transformation, encouraging believers to move beyond mere reflection and actively pursue justice and compassion in their communities (Philippians 2:4).¹⁸ By bridging theory and practice, practical theology empowers individuals and communities to embody the values of love, empathy, and service, thereby enriching the spiritual life of both caregivers and recipients of pastoral care.

Historical Development and Application

Though formally recognized in the 20th century, practical theology has deep roots in early Christian traditions, where theological reflection intersected with practical ministry concerns.¹⁹ Figures like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther grappled with applying theological principles to address real-world challenges.²⁰ The modern era of practical theology stemmed from concerns about the relevance of abstract theological discourse in navigating 20th-century social and cultural shifts. Pioneers like James Gustafson, Don Browning, and Stanley Grenz advocated for a theology that critically engages with social realities and informs action-oriented interventions.

This emphasis on critical engagement and contextual relevance has led to various applications of practical theology across diverse ministry settings. For instance, in chaplaincy, practical theology addresses the spiritual needs of people in hospitals,

¹⁸ Philippians 2:4.

¹⁹ Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering theology of mission (encountering mission): Biblical foundations, historical developments, and contemporary issues* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 82.

²⁰ William Dyrness, *Christian Apologetics in a World Community* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 42-43.

prisons, and military settings.²¹ Theo Pleizier's work challenges the crisis-oriented paradigm in pastoral care, advocating for a shift towards regular pastoral care that extends beyond crises. He explores the strengths of parish pastoral care, suggesting Christian communities offer a distinct context of care that transcends crisis moments.

In counseling, practical theology integrates theological insights into therapeutic practices, while in community development, it initiates social justice initiatives and empowers communities.²² Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi's article emphasizes the need for relevant ministry models in Africa, proposing an Adamic Christological model for pastoral care and healing. This framework aligns with African Christians' contextual sufferings, bridging the gap between Christ's ascension and the interim period of Christianity through the ongoing personal presence of God in believers' suffering.²³ Furthermore, in education, practical theology equips future pastors and lay leaders with practical skills and theological frameworks to navigate the complexities of ministry in diverse contexts. These applications underscore the multifaceted nature of practical theology and its enduring relevance in addressing contemporary challenges within Christian communities.

²¹ Theo Pleizier, "Ordinary Pastoral Care: Deconstructing the concept of crisis in practical theology," *International Academy of Practical Theology, Conference Series* 3 (2023): 65.

²² Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi, "Pastoral care and healing in Africa: Towards an Adamic Christological practical theology imagination for pastoral healing," *HTS: Theological Studies* 72, no. 2 (2016): 8.

²³ Magezi and Magezi, "Pastoral care and healing in Africa," 8.

Theological Foundations and Relationship to Pastoral Theology

Various theological foundations, including the doctrine of the incarnation and the call to liberation and love, underpin practical theology.²⁴ These foundations provide a framework for engaging with lived realities and guiding ministerial practice. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV) emphasizes the centrality of Scripture in equipping individuals for good works, aligning with the theological grounding of practical theology.²⁵ Distinct but closely related, practical and pastoral theology offer nuanced perspectives on ministry.²⁶ While practical theology encompasses diverse ministry contexts, pastoral theology focuses on caring for individuals and communities within a faith-based context. Both fields are committed to contextual sensitivity, critical reflection, and practical pastoral practices.

David E. Willis delves into John Calvin's theology of pastoral care, drawing primarily from Calvin's commentary on John 10.²⁷ Calvin accentuates Christ as the primary shepherd, underscoring the role of human pastors as instruments of Christ's word. Pastors are entrusted with leading, protecting, and nourishing the flock under the governance of Christ. Calvin's pastoral care aims at the wholeness of believers, emphasizing their mystical union with Christ and the assurance of salvation derived from it. Pastors reinforce believers in their identity in Christ, fostering repentance, assurance of

²⁴ Gijsbert Dingemans, "Practical theology in the academy: A contemporary overview," *The Journal of Religion* 76, no. 1 (1996): 83.

²⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

²⁶ Richard R. Osmer, "Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective," *HTS: Theological Studies* 67, no. 2 (2011): 6.

²⁷ David E. Willis, "Calvin's Theology of Pastoral Care," *Theology Matters*, February 27, 2023, 2, <https://www.theologymatters.com/articles/church-and-culture/2019/calvins-theology-of-pastoral-care/>.

pardon, and empowerment for newness of life. This commentary helps us understand that the relationship between practical and pastoral theology is symbiotic, enriching the other.²⁸ Practical theology draws upon insights from pastoral theology to develop relevant pastoral care practices. Pastoral theology benefits from the empirical insights from practical theology, fostering a dynamic dialogue between theory and lived experience. 1 Peter 5:2-3 (ESV) underscores the shepherd's role in pastoral care, emphasizing willing service, integrity, and leading by example.²⁹

Moreover, Calvin sees pastoral care as integral to social reform, emphasizing the transformative potential of wholeness.³⁰ Pastoral care encompasses Christian freedom, growth, and contextual discipline within the body of Christ. Willis asserts that Calvin's pastoral care theology informs contemporary discussions and practices, emphasizing the communal aspect and the integration of ordinary means of grace like preaching and sacraments. Calvin's emphasis on the role of pastors as shepherds under Christ's governance underscores the depth and complexity of pastoral ministry, offering insights into contemporary pastoral care practices. These arguments taught us that Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience are foundational pillars of practical and pastoral theology.³¹ Scripture provides the ethical framework for pastoral ministry, while tradition offers theological wisdom.

²⁸ Stephen Pattison and Gordon Lynch, "Pastoral and Practical Theology," *The Modern Theologians* 3 (2005): 416.

²⁹ 1 Peter 5:2-3.

³⁰ Willis, "Calvin's Theology of Pastoral Care," 3.

³¹ Dingemans, "Practical Theology in the Academy," 88.

Matthew 22:37-39 emphasizes the importance of love for God and others, which is foundational to pastoral care.³² Reason facilitates theological reflection, while experience shapes pastoral responses to human realities. Therefore, practical theology's theological foundations underscore its intimate relationship with pastoral theology, fostering theological reflection and ministerial practice within the church. By integrating theological principles and pastoral wisdom, practical theology empowers pastors and congregations to embody God's transformative love and grace in ministry.

Practical Theology Principles for Effective Pastoral Care in Family Ministry

The complexities of contemporary family life necessitate a departure from abstract theological concepts towards grounded pastoral care practices. Practical theology principles emerge as frameworks that guide navigating diverse family realities and provide sensitive, responsive support within family ministry. Several fundamental principles deeply rooted in practical theology lie at the core of effective pastoral care. First, empathy is the cornerstone, enabling caregivers to empathize with families' joys, sorrows, and struggles with genuine compassion.³³ Presence entails offering attentive, non-judgmental support and creating a safe space for families to express their experiences freely. Listening goes beyond mere hearing, involving active interpretation of emotions, unspoken needs, and underlying narratives. Discernment integrates theological insights, personal intuition, and contextual awareness to offer wise counsel and guidance.

³² Matthew 22:37-39.

³³ Emmanuel Agius and Joseph Galea Curmi, "Family Ministry: the interface between church doctrine and pastoral care," *Melita Theologica Journal of the Faculty of Theology* 65, no.1 (2015), 29.

Theological reflection encourages critical examination of practices, fostering continuous learning and adaptation to address evolving needs.

These principles function synergistically, where empathy and presence lay the foundation of trust, facilitating deep listening and uncovering unspoken anxieties and needs. Discernment, informed by theological understanding and contextual awareness, translates insights into concrete guidance.³⁴ Continuous reflection ensures practices remain relevant and responsive to the ever-changing dynamics of family life. The beauty of these principles lies in their adaptability to diverse contexts. For instance, in blended families, empathy allows for understanding the anxieties of stepparents and navigating potential conflicts.³⁵ Compassionate presence and deep listening benefit single-parent households, while discernment is the agent of practical support. Empathy and active listening nurture safe spaces for LGBTQ+ families, while discernment promotes inclusivity within worship settings and pastoral care. However, it is crucial to implement initiatives such as workshops for blended families, support groups for single parents, inclusive programs, and the LGBTQ + Family Show. As a result, the practical theories are used as transformational tools in devising better pastoral care practices within family ministry. In addition, pastoral care must extend to the many wounded people in our

³⁴ Kathleen Cahalan, Carol Lakey Hess, and Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Teaching practical theology: Introducing six perspectives," *International Journal of Practical Theology Berlin* 12, no. 1 (2008): 46.

³⁵ Vhumani Magezi and Patrick Nanthambwe, "Development and the role of the church: Exploring public pastoral care positioning within congregational ministry," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022): 2414.

church contexts; the wounded cannot forget their deep pain and grief. Pastoral care must guide people through forgiveness and sorrowful periods.³⁶

Contemporary Challenges in Family Ministry and Pastoral Care

The 21st-century families have various problems that call for flexible pastoral care approaches. However, ministries can no longer depend on uniform models because family contexts require specific approaches. These challenges range from societal shifts, cultural dynamics, and personal obstacles, pointing out the critical need for compassionate pastoral care. The nature of today's families is also based on multiple structures, socio-economic factors, social belonging, cultural influences, and mental health issues, which present complex challenges for pastoral mediators.

Navigating Shifting Family Structures

The current 21st century comes with the changing dynamic of family structures requiring flexible and sensitive methodologies to pastoral care. The standard nuclear family structure, however, is no longer the rule in that complex relationships involve divorce, single parenting, blended families, and cohabitation. Pastoral caregivers must modify their strategies to meet various families' differing needs. A case study by Vhumani Magezi on the patterns of changing families in Africa reveals the emergence of what is referred to as an "emerging family" due to the interplay between rural and

³⁶ Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 89.

urban.³⁷ These families struggle to balance traditional rural values and the flaws of urban life. Proverbs 24:3-4 highlights the value of wisdom and understanding that forms a stable household, which portrays practical, wise strategies for pastoral care.³⁸

Nevertheless, recent family structures go beyond the classic nuclear model, including blended families, single-parent homes, LGBTQ+ households, and multi-generational households. Each structure has peculiar problems that call for highly conscientious and non-discriminatory pastoral care. For example, blended families deal with the challenges of uniting lives and histories; single-parent homes cope with pressures to manage alone; LGBTQ+ households may be stigmatized by society, and multi-generational houses have diverse needs and perspectives.³⁹

Psalms 127:3-5 states that “Children are blessing from the lord, a reward from him. Just as arrows in the hands of a warrior, children born to old males.” “Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.”⁴⁰ Psalm 127: 3-5 implies that such family structures profoundly impact pastoral care, as children are a divine blessing and reward. Despite the intricacy of modern family structures such as blended families and single-parent homes, these verses emphasize children’s value. Pastoral caregivers can utilize this biblical approach to accentuate the spirituality of family life, providing appropriate guidance and

³⁷ Vhumani Magezi and Patrick Nanthambwe, “Development and the role of the church: Exploring public pastoral care positioning within congregational ministry,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022): 2414.

³⁸ Proverbs 24:3-4.

³⁹ Marilyn Coleman, Lawrence Ganong, Salvatore D’Amore, Scott Browning, Dena DiNardo, and Bindu Methikalam, “Boundary ambiguity: A focus on stepfamilies, queer families, families with adolescent children, and multigenerational families,” *American Psychological Association* (2022): 202.

⁴⁰ Psalm 127:3-5.

support specific to their type of family.⁴¹ Understanding children as arrows in the hands of a warrior implies having control over children's early development. This biblical ground enables pastoral care that recognizes the specific issues families must confront, strengthening a family-friendly atmosphere supportive of children's all-around flourishing. By becoming aware of such challenges and dealing with them tactfully but open-mindedly in the field of pastoral care, an atmosphere is created where families, regardless of how they are formed, can receive spiritual support that meets their specific situation.

The reality is that modern families tend to have parenting and relationship challenges due to societal pressures and personal beliefs. In Ephesians 6:4, the provision of pastoral caregivers is highlighted.⁴² They should be supportive and guide families with parenting problems. An excellent example of such research is the work by S. Hart, which studied the perceived effect of recent changes in American family structures related to congregational life and took responses from pastors to Lutheran Church members.⁴³ The changes identified in the American family include more married women working, single parenting, delayed or non-existent birth, and increased rates of divorce, among others. Hart's study showed that the changing patterns in family structures had positive and negative aspects regarding congregational life. Participants indicated several positive outcomes, including increased inclusivity and tolerance within congregations and enhanced equality in churches for women. However, negative impacts were also seen,

⁴¹ Maya Angelou, "Family Roles, Diversity, and Gender Issues," *Working with Families: A Guide for Health and Human Services Professionals* 75 (2020): 75.

⁴² Ephesians 6:4.

⁴³ S. Hart, "Religion and changes in family patterns," *Review of Religious Research* (1896): 68.

such as reduced religious attendance levels, difficulties with some aspects of relationships within churches, and undue pressure on pastors. This outlines the inherent difficulties in solving family disputes within religious congregations and developing a culture of adaptive pastoral care.

Disregarding the realities of diverse families can lead to alienation from some groups and neglect of their needs. Nam's commentary on 1 Samuel 3:11:20 informs about what to do with family issues in pastoral care.⁴⁴ Eli's poor leadership mirrors family anxieties about maintaining contact with others in vain struggles. Samuel and his family's naive trust in this new belief and the hesitation to adopt it completely symbolize the confusion many families may experience while transitioning from one faith into another, thus emphasizing how important pastoral care is for their support. Pastoral caregivers must embrace a pragmatic approach to providing for the family based on biblical teachings and modern-day understanding. Caregivers can alleviate the mentioned dynamics in front of separating family members by remodeling preventive measures and mitigating and maintaining pastoral strategies. By exercising proactive engagement and providing empathetic support, pastors can help create a healthy society by promoting resilience and cohesion in the family.

Socio-economic Inequalities and Their Consequences

The challenges faced by families in contemporary society are multifaceted, and pastoral care is critical to help address such complex issues. Such crises as financial uncertainty and domestic violence have a profound impact on family relationships and

⁴⁴ 1 Samuel 3:11:20.

personal health that require pastoral caregiving to provide crisis intervention, emotional support, and treatment options for recovery.⁴⁵ This aligns with the biblical perspective found in Proverbs 14:3.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the presence of various mental health issues within families, such as anxiety and depression, makes it necessary for pastoral caregivers to be trained in identifying signs of distress and being sensitive towards those suffering from psychological problems. Proverbs 22:9 (ESV) encourages generosity and giving, emphasizing the community's role in supporting individuals materially.⁴⁷ This biblical principle underscores the notion that blessing is found in acts of kindness toward the less fortunate, guiding pastoral care in promoting a compassionate and supportive environment.

An article by Michael J. Mann on the nexus of stigma and social policy highlights how nonconforming congregants, particularly those in the LGBTQ+ community, risk feeling ignored or discredited within their faith community. Stigmatization contributes to internalized homophobia, affecting mental health.⁴⁸ Recognizing this, pastoral care influenced by Proverbs 14:31 emphasizes the importance of treating individuals facing economic hardships with honor and respect.⁴⁹ Stigmatization's profound impact on pastoral care is evident in Mann's integrated conceptual framework, which explores the implications of working with LGBTQ+ individuals and their families. The article argues

⁴⁵ Angela Roberts Jones, "Enhancing Pastoral Care and Support by Providing Opportunities for Spiritual Growth and Transformation to Crisis and Trauma Sufferers," Diss., Liberty University, 2020, 35.

⁴⁶ Proverbs 14: 31.

⁴⁷ Proverbs 22:9.

⁴⁸ Michael J. Mann, "The nexus of stigma and social policy: Implications for pastoral care and psychotherapy with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons and their families," *Pastoral Psychology* 62 (2013): 192.

⁴⁹ Proverbs 14:31.

that decisions made by clergy and therapists regarding adaptive or dysfunctional behavior are inherently political. Stigmatization, both within religious communities and society at large, contributes to internalized homophobia, affecting mental health and well-being.⁵⁰ Pastoral care, guided by biblical principles, should counteract adverse effects by fostering an environment of acceptance and understanding.

An antiquated view of family within the church may deter seekers, hindering their spiritual growth (Isaiah 1:17).⁵¹ The biblical call for justice and defending the oppressed aligns with pastoral care addressing systemic issues contributing to economic inequality, advocating for policies uplifting the marginalized. Economic disparities cast a long shadow, impacting families struggling with poverty, job insecurity, and crushing debt burdens. Pastoral care, influenced by Matthew 25:35-36⁵² and James 2:15-16, involves practical assistance, financial counseling, and support to meet immediate needs.⁵³ Several Bible verses, like Psalm 10:14⁵⁴, James 5:4⁵⁵, and Mark 12:41-44, address economic struggles and injuries, significantly affecting their beliefs and impacting pastoral care.⁵⁶ For instance, in Psalm 10:14, the *Benson Commentary* underscores God's keen interest in wealth divisions and their unjust systems towards righteous people.⁵⁷ The commentary

⁵⁰ Mann, "The nexus of stigma and social policy," 202.

⁵¹ Isaiah 1:17.

⁵² Matthew 25:35-36.

⁵³ James 2:15-16.

⁵⁴ Psalm 10:14.

⁵⁵ James 5:4.

⁵⁶ Mark 12:41-44.

⁵⁷ Psalm 10:14.

highlights that it is clearly understood that God does not remain a mere onlooker but actively watches the malpractices of evil men toward the suppressed.

The tone represents divine punishment for the wrongdoings using special providence, especially in particular cases when there are no other options. This clearly shows the aspect of using divine grace because people are driven to God because of their poverty.⁵⁸ This commentary contributes to the pastoral care of socio-economic inconsistencies. It highlights the hope in divine justice and suggests that believers should let their anxieties go into a God's providence.

Another problem that comes with technology and media is screen addiction as well as loss of family intimacy on the level of personal contact.⁵⁹ These are some of the challenges that pastoral caregivers should focus on by advocating healthful boundaries and intentional interactions. Pastoral care practices must learn how to be responsive enough to the complex issues of families that involve working with social service agencies and offering resources such as financial counseling while addressing justice according to biblical beliefs. With this, the pastoral caregivers ought to deliver significantly concrete and holistic support beyond mere comfort words to satisfy these dynamic families' needs.

⁵⁸ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2023), 45.

⁵⁹ Cynthia Jean Chenard, "Pastoral Care During Major Traumatic Events: Implications for Pastoral Care for Emergency Responders and Their Care-Givers," DMin diss., Vancouver School of Theology (2004): 31.

The Cultural Diversity and the Demand for Sensitivity

Faith transmission from one generation to another is challenged by cultural diversity and generations present within the families because they change pastoral care. As a result, pastoral care providers play an essential role in family life by facilitating intergenerational discussions that encompass culturally sensitive and inclusive practices.⁶⁰ Impartiality and non-discrimination are reflected in the sections of biblical texts. James 2:1-4 urges believers not to show favoritism, emphasizing that discriminating based on external appearance goes against the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁶¹ This verse is for an approach that recognizes the inherent dignity of each individual, promoting fairness and inclusivity within the family ministry, enabling ministers to create a supportive and non-discriminatory environment, fostering healthy relationships, and addressing challenges within diverse family dynamics. Colossians 3:11 states, “Here there is no Gentile and Jew or circumcised uncircumcision nor barbarian Scythians or slaves free but Christ all in that he lives.”⁶² The Bible emphasizes Christ’s unity despite cultural diversity and other social conditions, strengthening the idea of oneness among members of this Christian community despite their cultural differences.

As such, Fukuyma and Sevig’s article describes the problematic nature of incorporating religious diversity and spirituality into chaplaincy care within an equally rapidly culturally diverse society.⁶³ These authors, counseling psychologists specializing

⁶⁰ Fiona Gardner, “Adding critical reflection to spiritual care: Complementing current pastoral care training,” *Journal for the Study of Spirituality* 10, no. 2 (2020):146.

⁶¹ James 2:1-4.

⁶² Colossians 3:11.

in applying spirituality to multicultural therapies, explore the facets of multicultural interaction. The authors define culture, spirituality, cultural diversity, multiculturalism, and counselor competencies using a systematic set of clarifying questions. Their work highlights the spiritually synergistic nature of multicultural engagement and promotes continuous professional learning as a response to cultural shifts in pastoral care.

Globalization has led to increased cultural diversity within family ministries. Families from diverse backgrounds bring varying religious traditions, languages, and societal perspectives. Caregivers should be aware of the cultural dynamics and apply sensitivity. In family ministry, differing religious traditions can challenge the creation of shared worship spaces. Open communication and flexibility are essential to integrating diverse faith practices and respecting cultural rituals.⁶⁴ Language barriers further complicate effective communication within culturally diverse families, necessitating the provision of translation services and culturally competent resources.⁶⁵ Prejudicial societal perspectives such as discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or origin, can affect families within a faith community. Galatians 3:28 (ESV) provides a biblical perspective on equality, stating, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁶⁶ This verse reinforces the idea that

⁶³ Mary A. Fukuyama and Todd D. Sevig, “Cultural Diversity in Pastoral Care,” *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 13, no. 2 (2004): 33.

⁶⁴ Edward R. Canda, Leola Dyrud Furman, and Hwi-Ja Canda, *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, USA, 2019), 19.

⁶⁵ Vhumani Magezi, “Positioning care as ‘being with the other’ within a cross-cultural context: Opportunities and challenges of pastoral care provision amongst people from diverse cultures,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020): 7.

⁶⁶ Galatians 3:28.

all believers are equal within the Christian community, regardless of cultural or social differences.

Importance of Contextualization and Cultural Sensitivity

The effective solving of modern family issues requires the incorporation of both contextualization and cultural sensitivity as two critical principles drawn from biblical teachings and best practices in history. As stated in 1 Corinthians 9: 25 (ESV), the apostle Paul is an excellent example of changing his style to suit different people without losing what our gospel stands for⁶⁷ This verse highlights the importance of adaptability and sensitivity to transfer timeless truths into different cultural settings. Contextualization is understanding that families operate in particular socio-economic, cultural, and structural contexts. Finally, interacting with their distinct contexts and difficulties necessitates going beyond broad strategies and adapting pastoral care to specific needs. In understanding the challenges of family dynamics, pastoral caregivers are better placed to formulate more appropriate solutions for assisting in such situations.

Cultural sensitivity is one of the most critical aspects when respecting and understanding different cultures, religious traditions, and language peculiarities.⁶⁸ Development of cultural competence includes continued learning, active listening, and adapting pastoral practices to create a diverse, welcoming environment for families. It entails appreciating the diversity and richness in societies and respecting people's values

⁶⁷ Corinthians 9: 25.

⁶⁸ Carrie Doehring, "Teaching theological empathy to distance learners of intercultural spiritual care," *Pastoral Psychology* 67, no. 5 (2018): 462.

and beliefs. By adopting contextualization and cultural sensitivity values, family ministry will move away from a one-size-fits-all approach towards implementing approaches that harmonize with the uniqueness of today's families. Such an approach improves pastoral care quality and creates a feeling of belongingness and, thus, empowerment within the faith community.

Biblical Views on Family Values

As a main source of wisdom, the Bible features different perspectives on family life, which connect to flaws and ideals. The purposeful design by God for families may be understood in Genesis 1-2 since there is biblical support of a divine institution to symbolize love, harmony, and passion.⁶⁹ The scriptural point of view widens to incorporate several arrangements, recognizing the realization and significance of non-standard compositions. Illustrations on the family of Ruth and stories about a single parent, such as Hannah, depict biblical moral issues regarding intermarriages or people living under different families.

Moreover, the Bible provides family life and some relationships in several families, either positively or negatively, as learning cases. Proverbs 31: 10-31 demonstrates the good qualities of a virtuous lady; it gives them an ideal role model, while stories like Cain and Abel show how not to act when there are conflicts among family members.⁷⁰ The caregiving roles within families are emphasized in passages like

⁶⁹ Genesis 1-2.

⁷⁰ Proverbs 31: 10-31.

Ephesians 5: 21-33, stating that love is mutual and selfless.⁷¹ The family becomes sanctified, where love and personal evolution about people are present. Research on religious systems becomes relevant because modern families are changing.

Theological Traditions and Pastoral Care Approaches

Various theological schools provide useful perspectives that can support pastoral care in family ministry. For instance, Liberation Theology is an image that protests against oppressive systems and represents justice and respect for all families.⁷² Liberation Theology becomes an effective tool to counter the structural injustices that influence families and give them strength and power because it is based on race, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation. Besides, feminist theology focuses on aspects like gender violence, healthy, and non-patriarchal relationships in power in pastoral care.⁷³ Responding to the marginalization of women in mainstream Christian theology, feminist theology began as a movement focused on critique but soon encompassed both critical and constructive aspects.⁷⁴ Originating from the exclusion of women, it has developed into a major factor in Christian religious discussions. For the pastoral caregivers, this will guide them in erecting an atmosphere at home where mutual respect and support are observed.

⁷¹ Ephesians 5: 21-33.

⁷² Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 146.

⁷³ Marjorie Suchocki, *Feminist Theology*, The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 1998), 1.

⁷⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation," *Theological Studies* 36, no. 4 (1975): 611.

The process theology fosters an image of presence and transformative love through relationships with God. This theological tradition seeks pastoral care practices oriented towards openness as good communication, cultivating mutual development, and adjusting to evolving situations within families. Robert Mellert argues that process theology possesses value because it provides a comprehensive philosophical platform for assimilating all human activities and beliefs.⁷⁵ The inclusive basis allowed by process theology makes it an effective tool in synthesizing divergent content, helping place a basis for all questions of both existential and ontological nature. The flexibility and compatibility of the theological approach make it an excellent tool for understanding people's complexities in life and beliefs.

Process theology offers inclusivity and relevance to contemporary issues. Bernard Loomer presents strengths of process theology, such as fostering a relational understanding of divinity.⁷⁶ However, he cites weaknesses of complexity, potential theological deviations, and anthropomorphism. Therefore, pastoral caregivers can move beyond rigidly defined interpretations for contextual and universally dynamic ministry centered on family differences through these theological settings. Incorporating these theological viewpoints enhances pastoral care by making such an approach more sensitive and corresponding to different difficulties in family life.

⁷⁵ Robert B. Mellert, *What is Process Theology?* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1975), 117.

⁷⁶ Bernard M. Loomer, "Process Theology: Origins, Strengths, Weaknesses," *Process Studies* 16, no. 4 (1987): 248.

Theological Reflection and Bible Interpretation

Several biblical interpretations and theological papers have informed pastoral care in family minorities. From a biblical perspective, Matthew 5:16 indicates that Christians are encouraged to allow their light to shine before others, pointing towards the need for virtue that manifests God's good.⁷⁷ In the light of care offered to non-believers, this verse invites consideration of possibly transforming the power of compassionate and virtuous provision. The focus on "good deeds" also correlates with the understanding that pastoral care needs to go beyond mere words, encompassing meaningful acts of kindness and aid.⁷⁸ While studying the dynamics between religious traditions, family discourse, and pastoral approaches, retired clergy Wilcox–Chavez-Franz outlines a lenient relationship of how families influence worship through daily conversations.⁷⁹ Utilizing information from the National Congregations Study, mainline Protestant congregations ideology differences and those among conservative Catholics do not translate into uniquely distinctive family ministries. This discrepancy between discourse and practice shows the uniform outcomes of religion on family life, although there are various types of family discourses. The research highlights the importance of taking a fine-grained approach to pastoral care in different religious practices, especially when dealing with non-traditional families.⁸⁰ Pastoral practitioners become guiding lights of God's love, evoking awe and

⁷⁷ Matthew 5:16.

⁷⁸ Matthew 5:16.

⁷⁹ W. Bradford Wilcox, Mark Chaves, and David Franz, "Focused on the Family? Religious traditions, family discourse, and pastoral practice," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 4 (2004): 492.

⁸⁰ Wilcox, Chaves, and Franz, "Focused on the Family?" 498.

glorification that pleases the heavenly being. This verse promotes an organized way of pastoral care, which is a material translation of the Christian faith to those who may not even be believers in it.

In “Meyer’s NT Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9:22,” Paul addresses the concept of becoming all things to all people for the gospel’s sake.⁸¹ He adapts himself to various circumstances, aiming to save some. The term refers to weak Christians, emphasizing the need for sensitivity in dealing with their vulnerabilities.⁸² The phrase “I have become” reflects Paul’s approach to connecting with diverse audiences without compromising core principles. Barbara’s work critically examines the prevalent influence of individualism within the field of pastoral psychotherapy and counseling.⁸³ The author acknowledges the resistance to change within pastoral counseling practitioners, which has featured in Meyer’s Commentary, attributing it to the deeply embedded nature of individualism in the field’s theological, theoretical, and organizational structures. This adaptation aims not at men-pleasing but the wise exercise of Christian love and self-denial. It showcases Paul’s wisdom and highlights the transformative power of contextualized ministry. McClure argues for radical transformations, including a broadened theological framework, an expanded role for pastoral counselors, a reimagined anthropology, a nuanced understanding of sin and judgment, a shift from the individual to the particular, a reconsideration of ideal outcomes, and a reimagining of organizational structures.⁸⁴ These

⁸¹ Meyer, “Meyer’s NT Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9:22,” Bible Hub, 2022, 1, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/meyer/1_corinthians/9.htm.

⁸² 1 Corinthians 9:22.

⁸³ Barbara J. McClure, *Moving Beyond Individualism in Pastoral Care and Counseling: Reflections on Theory Theology and Practice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 162.

⁸⁴ McClure, *Moving Beyond Individualism in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 186.

transformative shifts are deemed necessary for pastoral counseling to move beyond its individualistic limitations and provide more complex, compelling, and socially relevant forms of healing. Paul emphasizes contextual sensitivity in ministry, tailoring his methods without compromising essential principles. This reflects a nuanced understanding of cultural dynamics and individual needs to share the gospel effectively.

Integrating Contemporary Insights and Best Practices Into Family Ministry

Modern knowledge and present-day standards for effective family ministry need to be involved. In society, the dynamic components require flexible solutions that must be changed to solve problems. With these evidence-based interventions and innovative counseling sessions along with cooperative community models, it becomes possible for one to define family, considering its role in our lives.⁸⁵ This also guarantees that pastoral care constantly evolves to meet changing families' dynamic needs and preserve a friendly environment. Adopting these attitudes helps the family ministries handle the issues that come about due to contemporary living to facilitate families in navigating through time by giving information and support on how best one can live today.

Conclusion

In conclusion, pastoral care for non-traditional families has emerged as a significant issue affecting ministries, and pastors and religious groups need to address the challenges they face in pursuing pastoral care. Pastors must emphasize God's all-inclusive love, clear communication, and the themes of faithfulness, obedience, and

⁸⁵ Miller-McLemore, "Toward Greater Understanding of Practical Theology," 116.

divine revelation for caregivers and families. The practical theological principles are applied to family ministry to tackle challenges in pastoral care. The approach supports the hypothesis of fostering trauma support, inclusivity, spiritual guidance, and Christ-like love, emphasizing that pastors should heed divine guidance, prioritize diversity, and exhibit empathy in pastoral care. Several questions on the pastoral care of non-traditional families arise. However, research incites that practical theology application addresses the challenges facing pastoral care in non-traditional families and impacts family ministry in practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In the present world where there is continuous development, families' organizational structures and operating functions have changed significantly. The composition of families has evolved to encompass single-parent households, blended families, same-sex partnerships, and extended family structures. The theme of pastoral care for the unusual families in Mahoney and Krumrei's work includes accepting the multiple religious variants and family traditions.¹ The authors point out differences in faith and practices within each religion, emphasizing the role of theological views in developing and maintaining family relations. Integrating traditional and modern views can create an environment of inclusivity and empathy that nourishes healthy relationships in all types of families.²

More focus on theological viewpoints concerning non-traditional families can help shape future research in this field. The diversity in family structure presents challenges and opportunities to the church as it seeks to reach a wide range of family types. The church's spiritual leadership calls for accounting for the complexity of modern

¹ Annette Mahoney and Elizabeth J. Krumrei, "Questions left unaddressed by religious familism: Is spirituality relevant to non-traditional families," *The Oxford Handbook of the Psychology of Spirituality*, ed. Lisa J. Miller (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 125-143.

² Mahoney and Krumrei, "Questions left unaddressed by religious familism," 125-143.

family relations and creating a family-system-friendly environment. A need for the church to adapt its practices to pastoral care, counseling, and support as a congregation becomes more and more diverse and is also unavoidable. This means that it has to do with the transformation of such concepts as family and the adoption by the ministry of the more inclusive and loving model.

A holistic approach is needed to manage the variety of problems experienced by the church in its services to families of different types. An interdisciplinary approach allows for the application of various knowledge, diverse perspectives, and multiple methodologies across different fields to solve complex issues.³ Therefore, a section of the project focuses on how “Family Systems Theory” would enhance our understanding of pastoral care for non-traditional families.⁴

Family Systems Theory has its roots in psychology, which elucidates how individuals within a family unit interact and influence one another’s behaviors by examining relational patterns, communication dynamics, and systemic influences to understand family functioning.⁵ This approach concerns traditional theological outlook and considers psychological, sociological, and other closely relevant perspectives. This project aims to look at how Family Systems Theory can relate to the Church’s view of family in the present day to determine a more caring and constructive way of providing

³ Steph Menken and Machiel Keestra, “An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Research: Theory and Practice,” *An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Research* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 31-32.

⁴ Judy Haefner, “An Application of Bowen Family Systems Theory,” *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 35, no. 11 (2014): 835-841.

⁵ Fred Rothbaum, Karen Rosen, Tatsuo Ujiie, and Nobuko Uchida, “Family systems theory, attachment theory, and culture,” *Family Process* 41, no. 3 (2002): 328-344.

pastoral care. Recognizing interconnectedness and addressing systemic issues facilitates healthier relationships and fosters holistic growth within families.

Justification of the Chosen Systems Theory of Family Context

Murray Bowen, a psychiatrist, came up with the Family Systems Theory in the 1950s, which focuses on the interrelatedness of family members and underpins the systems' level of family dynamics.⁶ The theory implies that events that will affect one family member affect the whole system of families. The importance of perceiving families as a whole is underlined by understanding family relationships in terms of a complete system rather than single isolated individuals.

The practical value of Family Systems Theory in the church context emanates from its emphasis on how family members influence each other's behavior and experiences.⁷ Most churches, including this church context, is made up of families. By applying the Family System Theory, we can peek into communication styles, family dynamics, and interpersonal interactions within a family. As a result, this insight can form a basis for pastoral care approaches that are sensitive and adaptive to various nuances of family living in the modern world, and, in the end, generate a more embracing and respectful ecclesiastical community.

⁶ Haefner, "An Application of Bowen Family Systems Theory," 835-841.

⁷ Rothbaum, Rosen, Ujiie, and Uchida, "Family systems theory, attachment theory, and culture," 328-344.

The Problem Statement

The church context currently experiences difficulty ministering to families because it possesses an antiquated understanding of what constitutes a family. If families are not biblically skilled and equipped, they cannot minister to the unique needs of the context. The hypothesis is that “If leadership within the context participate in a symposium on the dynamics of family in the 21st century, then they will be equipped to come away with skills that will help them minister to the needs of the unique family dynamics found in my context.”

Hypothesis

The hypothesis predicts that, by participating in a symposium on families’ evolution in the 21st century, the church leadership would acquire the knowledge and skills needed to develop a friendly, welcoming, and hospitable environment for the entire spectrum of modern-day families. This will be possible with other factors and will hopefully provide more engaging care and church support to families regardless of their structure.

Purpose

This chapter aims to know how the Systemic Family Theory could work to suit the church in serving families with diverse makeup. With a focus on incorporating findings from psychology into the agenda of the church’s pastoral care, this effort seeks to fortify the program so that all forms of family are supported and nurtured. This would mean, for example, developing specialized pastoral care strategies and providing a

platform for congregation members to discuss their family models, worries, and the general sense of belongingness to the church community.

Interdisciplinary Theory: Family Systems Theory

History and Background

The Family Systems Theory is a psychological approach that seeks to understand families' intricate communications and relationships. It was developed by Murray Bowen, a psychiatrist, in the 1950s. It became groundbreaking in the area of understanding the dynamics of family interactions and deciding what impact they had on individual behavior.⁸ The theory emphasizes that all family members are seen as a system of variously tied individuals who can only be explained by understanding how they behave through their interconnected behaviors and emotions.⁹ “The theory includes eight concepts that have a logical progression that builds on the family as an emotional unit; they are: 1) Nuclear Family Emotional System, 2) The Differentiation of Self, 3) Triangles, 4) Cutoff, 5) Family Projection Process, 6) Multi-generational Transmission Process, 7) Sibling Position, and 8) Societal Emotional Process.”¹⁰

The theory suggests that in observing the overall functioning of a family, family members are influenced, with each one helping to stabilize or disorganize the system.¹¹

⁸ Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory* (Lake Frederick, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2004), 1-2.

⁹ Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*, 5-6.

¹⁰ Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*, 3.

Papero articulates a profound argument in his book concerning family systems theory that the Earth is four billion years old and is a system. “A shift in of its elements produces a response in others. The Earth’s great oceans, atmosphere, and land have always formed an interactive whole. Living things have always had the capacity to influence their environment.”¹² The central theme is that the young man discovers his organization’s self, finds it on the model of some triangle structures, overcomes his Alexithymia, and triggers the multigenerational traumatic transmission. Family System Theory affirms principles of conducting effective communication, maintaining roles, and establishing healthy family boundaries to support long and healthy relationships.

Bowen’s theory was a product of his family observations in clinical practices and his life experiences during which he interacted with patients. With his psychiatric background combined with his infatuation with the way family dynamics develop, Bowen designed a model of psychoanalysis that stood in contrast to popular treatments that were limited to people’s individuality at the time.¹³ Bowen moved from seeing an individual on their own to exploring the co-presence of family members in the system and how the system influences the functioning of a single member. Throughout its history, Bowen’s family systems theory has constantly evolved from his initial observations to create a well-integrated framework involving concepts from systems, cybernetics, and biology.¹⁴ It has gradually gained prominence as a building block theory

¹¹ Nancy V. Wedemeyer and Harold D. Grotevant, “Mapping the family system: A technique for teaching family systems theory concepts,” *Family Relations* (1982): 185-193.

¹² Daniel V. Papero, *Bowen Family Systems* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1990), 21.

¹³ Mary Ann Crossno, “Bowen Family Systems Theory,” *Marriage and Family Therapy: A practice-oriented approach*, ed. Linda Metcalf (New York, NY: Springer Publisher, 2011), 39-43.

¹⁴ Crossno, “Bowen Family Systems Theory,” 39-43.

for family counseling, psychology, and sociology, with educational and research communities attesting to the principles in their conversing and studies.

Key Concepts and Principles

Family system theory is governed by five key concepts: Differentiation of Self, Triangulation, Emotional Fusion, Family Patterns, Multigenerational Transmission, and Circular Causality. According to Dr. Murray Bowen, the *Differentiation of Self* is the ability of individuals to differentiate from their families, which is not always equal.¹⁵ Those with higher degrees of differentiation lay a better foundation for preserving internal stability in the presence of powerful emotional states. However, *Triangulation* suggests that families often tend to “cling together” instead of denouncing a confrontation between two family members by involving the third person.¹⁶ Bowen explained that the triangulation phenomenon characterized many families, and this required family members to learn different ways of solving conflicts.

Third, *Emotional Fusion* can be understood as splitting boundaries between spouses, resulting in overdependence and hyperemotionality.¹⁷ Bowen stressed Emotional Fusion as the leading cause of all relationship problems and identified each individual’s need for emotional independence. *Family Patterns and Multigenerational Transmission* refers to knowledge and understanding of behavior patterns among family members, which are essential. Such patterns are transmitted across the generations. By discovering

¹⁵ Murray Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice*, ed. Philip J. Guerlin, Jr. (Cincinnati, OH: Gardner Press, 1976), 66-67.

¹⁶ Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A new way of thinking about the individual and the group* (Falls Church, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 46-47.

¹⁷ Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*, 34-36.

and linking their family histories and dynamics, everyone can learn how various generations and traditions impact current familial values.

Lastly, in *Circular Causality*, Bowen inferred that interactions are circular casing from within the family system's membrane. Each member's behavior is modulated by and modulates the behavior of other family members.¹⁸ The granularity of this rising-and-falling process suggests the very knotty-ness of inter-family relationships. By examining these key concepts and principles, practitioners and researchers can better understand the underlying mechanisms driving family dynamics. Family Systems Theory provides a comprehensive framework for assessing and intervening in family systems, offering valuable insights for those seeking to promote healthy relationships and facilitate growth within families.

Family Systems Theory and the Project Problem

A family has many perspectives and understandings, but more importantly, the church today must understand what a family's composition is in the 21st century. The 21st century has a different sense of family, which means a more critical understanding for the church to carry out their work effectively. According to Dames, ministering to families and communities in the 21st century is challenged by socioeconomic issues. Traditional pastoral approaches may struggle to address complex needs such as poverty, systemic injustice, and diverse family structures. Since churches currently experience difficulty ministering to families because they possess an antiquated understanding of what constitutes a family, it is essential to determine effective pastoral care that requires

¹⁸ Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," 76-77.

holistic strategies that confront systemic issues and empower individuals within their contexts. One of the major challenges in 21st-century churches is the evolution of non-traditional family structures, including single-parent families, blended families, same-sex couples, and extended families. “Practical theology as a crisis science highlights the dwindling authority of Scripture, church, and leadership in revealing a growing discontinuity between church and society. Theology should respond to the 21st century challenge of a changing culture. Few traditional churches have transformed and instead became functional poststructuralists (henceforth missional). The majority of churches remain stuck in their structuralist.”¹⁹

In family systems theory, Bowen offered a helpful perspective that helps deal with the problems of non-traditional family structures within church settings. This is highlighted by the model of systems that concentrate on the family as a whole and as a unit. The family members’ interactions and dynamics are considered rather than just the personality traits of each family member.²⁰ Through this method, church leaders consider varied family forms and difficult situations in families and then develop distinct pastoral care plans to be applied. For instance, exploring the workings of differentiation of self and its impact on non-traditional families can be insightful to leaders in their support and assistance to individuals to preserve their identity while building relationships. Besides, the Family Systems Theory points out the role of society and cultural factors in the family’s well-being.²¹ It explores the conditions of families that are politically prejudiced

¹⁹ Gordon E. Dames, “The dilemma of traditional and 21st century pastoral ministry: Ministering to families and communities faced with socio-economic pathologies,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66, no. 2 (2010): 1.

²⁰ Haefner, “An Application of Bowen Family Systems Theory,” 836.

or stigmatized. These principles give church leaders the tools to engender a more inclusive and comforting environment where all families, regardless of the family structure, such as singles, parents, and children, feel noticed and respected.

Moreover, non-traditional family structures are now more visible and recognized in society, challenging traditional norms and expectations, and reflecting societal shifts, cultural changes, and individual preferences. The Family System Theory can help if a project on widening pastoral care for non-traditional families is considered in the church context. The analysis of family dynamics in the church can achieve this. There will be attention paid on how family systems exist on the church level and affect individual behavior, interpersonal relations, and psychosocial development in early childhood age groups that affect our Sunday School population. To further become a relevant, effective, and creative ministry for this 21st early generation, “we must recognize that early childhood is a time of forming an initial sense of self full of new social experiences and development.”²² In the church, families constitute the core of the fellowship, characterized by the fact that they comprise a community of people whose customs and norms are grounded on Christian values and which substantially shape the character of the church. Family Systems Theory provides a helpful key for visualizing the multi-dimensional interactions and the significance of familial relationships contributed to pastoral care. Through systematic examination, the pastors can put different nuclear and blended families, divorced parents, same-sex families, and other kinds of households in

²¹ Haefner, “An Application of Bowen Family Systems Theory,” 836.

²² Diana Lang, Nick Cone, Stephanie Loalada, Laura Overstreet, Ross Thompson, Joel A Muraco, Wendy Ruiz, Rebecca Laff, and Jamie Skow, *Psychosocial Development in Early Childhood* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University, 2022), 9.

the community. As a result, a well-rounded picture and representation of the situation can be made. Developing knowledge of family diversities produces a more compassionate and all-inclusive ministry where different family structures are catered for and addressed in terms of their peculiar needs and challenges.

The ways a family communicates and relates to each other are what define the dynamic of the family and affect how members relate to the church community. Theorists of family systems paid much attention to the effectiveness of communication as a prerequisite for productive interactions and conflict resolution in the family system.²³ Communication patterns between family members are an intricate part of the church setting and have extensive implications in this area. Keeping up to date with the language families use is both spoken and nonverbal, and listening, validating, and comforting patterns, among others, play a huge role in a church leader. Such leadership can be seen through family communication styles and deducing strengths and improvement areas.²⁴ Likewise, they may note the good communication culture in some families while others may show signs of avoidance, conflict avoidance, or even passive-aggressive communication, which may negatively impact relationships.

Furthermore, recent studies indicate that non-traditional families require pastoral care approaches that value inclusivity, compassion, and strong relationships, dispelling misconceptions and providing support tailored to diverse family structures. Therefore, pastoral care for diverse congregations necessitates compassionate, relevant, inclusive biblical counseling that embraces diversity, drawing on the scriptures to meet the type of

²³ Haefner, "An Application of Bowen Family Systems Theory," 840.

²⁴ Christian Linda Garris, "Understanding families: Applying family systems theory to early childhood practice," *YC Young Children* 61, no 1 (2006): 5.

families who perhaps struggle. Family Systems Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that focuses on resolving individual problems within the family. It emphasizes understanding group dynamics and how individual actions impact the entire family.²⁵ Also, the Family Systems approach points out a complicated network of members in the family and the influence of their acts by the more comprehensive family system. Churches can then discuss how family life affects people's attendance in church activities, the intensity with which they practice spiritual practices, and belonging — internal or external.²⁶ Therefore, church leaders can go a long way in linking the interpersonal dynamics in the church by getting a glance into tendencies, such as closeness, conflict, and emotionality within the church. By acknowledging the dependence of family members and their interactions outlined in the church's context, pastors can develop therapeutic intervention and support systems to solve the problems and enhance the care of congregants.

In line with Family Systems Theory, relationships show their importance in building a family system and in changing individuals' behavior as well. Church leaders could carry out relationships among families, including the amount of affection, exchanging affirmations, and providing support. Leaders can nourish spirituality and reinforce spiritual growth within the congregation by developing and reinforcing positive relationships and strengthening interpersonal connections. Finally, this Family Systems Theory's application to the problem allows for a complete assessment of family dynamics in the church community, which also embraces an exploration of the communication

²⁵ Richard H. Mikesell, Don-David Lusteran, and Susan H. McDaniel, *Integrating Family Therapy: Handbook of Family Psychology and Systems Theory*, 1st ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1995), 13-14.

²⁶ Stephen Pattison, *Care and Liberation Theology*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 24.

patterns and relationships described. The gained understanding of relational dynamics enables church leaders to define new support tools and interventions and improve pastoral care and the care of non-traditional families within the church.

Integration with Biblical Foundations

Biblical Models of Family and Community

Incorporating Family Systems Theory with biblical background inevitably provokes a well-thought-out examination of biblical models of family and community, which are illustrated in the sacred texts. The thoughtfulness of the scriptures, with their different stories, more straightforward teachings, and moral intersections, helps grasp the nature and unity of family members and the significance of a community in faith. Linda Garriss Christin focused on applying the Family Systems Theory in early childhood; she discussed mechanisms of Family Systems Theory, asserting that families are united by the ring where one member notates the whole unit.²⁷ 1 Samuel 3:1-19 highlights the role of priest Eli in mentoring Samuel. Samuel is raised in the Temple rather than a conventional household in this non-traditional family arrangement, which informs an approach to pastoral care for non-traditional families.²⁸ Family Systems Theory allows educational practitioners to become aware of maneuvering between multiple family situations and nurturing helpful communication with children.

²⁷ Christian, "Understanding Families," 4-5.

²⁸ Bible Gateway, "1 Samuel 3:1-19 - English Standard Version," Bible Gateway, 2015, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Samuel%203%3A1-19&version=ESV>.

Moreover, in Genesis, one scriptural model of the family is found in the creation narrative, where God allowed the marriage between Adam and Eve. This symbolized a foundational relationship of partnership and companionship within the family unit. This biblical story shows the sanctity of marriage and is, therefore, a teaching story under supportive principles such as mutual aid and cooperation between spouses. Mark 3:35 explains, “Whoever does God’s will shall be my brother, sister, and mother.”²⁹ This verse emphasizes the spiritual family and the idea that familial relationships extend beyond biological ties to include those who share in faith and obedience to God’s will. It reflects a broader understanding of family beyond traditional biological structures.

Furthermore, the Bible is rich in stories of family members who loved each other, stood for each other, and even sacrificed for each other. We can see such a relationship exemplified in Ruth and Naomi, Joseph and his brothers, and the teaching of Jesus about love and forgiveness within the family. The complicated dynamic of family in the business world by the Family Firm Institute, Inc., shows how complex these systems are giving serious consideration to the interests of the individuals, groups, and generations making up the family enterprise similar to the regular families.³⁰ This is aligned with how the Bible texts and the Basic Principles of the Family Systems Theory interconnect to highlight the families’ in-built system.

The family underscores the reality of resiliency, optimism, and long-term strategies as solid attributes of the family enterprises. These traits in the Bible give us a

²⁹ Bible Gateway, “Mark 3:35 - English Standard Version,” Bible Gateway, 2015, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%203%3A35&version=ESV>.

³⁰ Family Firm Institute, *Family Enterprise: Understanding Families in Business and Families of Wealth* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2014), 1.

sense of purpose, to keep going, and to have faith. Ephesians 4:16 reads “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”³¹ While not directly addressing family systems, this verse speaks to the interconnectedness and mutual support within the body of believers, to the functioning of a family system. It underscores the importance of unity, cooperation, and mutual care within the community of faith. While the concept of loyalty is emulated as a prominent feature in family businesses, which in turn serves to reflect biblical works that outline the essential values carried by a family, the idea of succession within family businesses holds excellent significance to biblical themes of family bonds and responsibilities.³² The Family Firm Institute and the integration between Family Systems Theory and Biblical Foundations acknowledge the need to understand the various roles and relationships within the family system. It considers them the most crucial part of family life to be consistent and stable.

In addition,

[T]he concept of family is part of the worldviews of almost all societies. While different models of the family have been constructed and are useful, it is important to remember that each member of a family lives in her experience and story of the family. The social construct family is construed differently by each family member. Each lives in a different family. The family however, defined or structured is a human system consisting of interactions among its members.³³

³¹ Bible Gateway, “Ephesians 4:16,” English Standard Version, Bible Gateway, 2015, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%204%3A16&version=NIV>.

³² Family Firm Institute, *Family Enterprise*, 17.

³³ Raphael J. Becvar, Dorothy Stroh Becvar, and Lynne V. Reif, *Systems Theory and Family Therapy: A Primer* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), 67.

By understanding and applying the principles from the Bible along with Family Systems Theory, we can gain a deeper understanding of the design and fluidity of family. “For example, every family is composed of a multi-generational system or emotional unit. All of us have a functioning position based upon our gender, birth order, family patterns and traditions.”³⁴ We have all heard these labels such as the “responsible,” “the oldest,” “the smart one,” “the baby,” or the “mediator.”³⁵

Engagement with Theological Foundations

Synthesis with Family Systems Theory Framework

Total integration of theological views and the Family Systems Theory framework is achieved by locating points of agreement and disagreement between these two methods and looking at how each can create and increase their effectiveness in spiritual counseling. A combination of Smith-Acuña’s views with system theory would indicate that the need for change in psychotherapy is crucial.³⁶ The FST concept illustrates the cyclical pattern of family systems that naturally resist change. It stimulates the seemingly contradictory idiom stating, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”³⁷ For example, system theory states that systems always try to keep equability (homeostasis), and thereby, FST underlines how families show stability even during

³⁴ Travis N. Bos, *Family Systems Theory and the Bible* (North Haven, CT: Independently Published, 2023), 13-14.

³⁵ Bos, *Family Systems Theory and the Bible*, 13-14.

³⁶ Shelly Smith-Acuña, *Systems Theory in Action: Applications to individual, couple, and family therapy* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 67-70.

³⁷ Smith-Acuña, *Systems Theory in Action*, 67-70.

external tension or within interaction processes. Moreover, FST focuses on navigating through first- and second-order change and the coverup symptoms while uncovering deep relations for more profound modification.³⁸

Additionally, one of the essential concepts of systems theory, like implicit family rules, coincides with FST's intention to identify and intervene in these rules to uncover family dynamics and provide more effective therapy.³⁹ Family Systems Theory is beneficial in analyzing the dynamics of family systemic relationships, including the mutual influence of family members on each other's behaviors, as theological perspectives deepen our understanding of the holiness of family interactions and the ethical requirements of love and kindness. This blending significantly illustrates the intricacy of change in family systems, which necessarily will imply that therapists must go through the resistance, build partnerships, and develop transformational growth.

Moreover, the discussion around the person being created in the image of God, another example from the perspective of theology, lends itself easily to Family Systems Theory's principles like sensitivity, empathy, respect, and understanding, which should define family relationships.⁴⁰ Theology similarly teaches the concepts of forgiving and reconciling; thus, the same can be used as an outlet for resolving conflicts and bringing harmony to groups. According to Jacob Priest, the Family Systems Theory ties the subtle connection between the family units and the more extensive sociocultural system.⁴¹

³⁸ Smith-Acuña, *Systems Theory in Action*, 67-70.

³⁹ Smith-Acuña, *Systems Theory in Action*, 67-70.

⁴⁰ M. C. Horowitz, "The Image of God in Man — is woman included?," *Harvard Theological Review* 72, no. 3-4 (1979): 175-206.

⁴¹ Jacob B. Priest, *The Science of Family Systems Theory* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 48.

Family System Theory discussions of late tend to focus on family processes. Still, a new approach considers social circumstances and the family and seeks mutual influence. Alan Carr's exposition of the fact that the family patterns repeat and reflect the larger social systems, which clearly implies the interconnectedness of social structures and personal interactions, shows how the family dynamics work both ways, being shaped by society and, at the same time, shaping broader social systems.⁴² They also talk about how power, dominance, and mistreatment, promulgated by the cultural structure, engulf the autonomy and adaptation of family members.

In this way, by considering the connection between family structures and broader societal structures, the therapists can better contextualize family ills and develop more collaborative and culturally sensitive interventions that support people in the long term. The opposition will be considered between theological concepts of divine sovereignty and human agency and the Family Systems Theory principle of individual autonomy and self-differentiation. Through dialogue and critical thinking, church leaders can find a way to crack down on such tensions to enable the participation of faith-based, theological insights to utilize Family Systems Theory in pastoral care practices. Encountering the theological perspectives of family and care and connecting them with the Family System Theory leads to developing a sacramental approach to pastoral care aimed at uplifting faith in the sacred nature of family life and the well-being of the church's family members.

⁴² Alan Carr, *Family Therapy: Concepts, Process, and Practice* (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 59.

Relevance to Contemporary Context and Family Systems Theory

Modern pastoral care and family ministry approaches are compared with the Family System Theory that has been examined. Though models of pastoral care have adapted to social, cultural, and theological transformations, many core principles of this form of pastoral care are still applicable in the contemporary context of our society today. Patricia Pitta and her colleagues argue that the Treatment Models for Complex Clinical Issues “emphasizes that couples and families have to constantly deal with complex problems, such as when one or both of the partners cheat, when infertility occurs in the couple, when the marriage comes to an end, or when societal problems like racism, immigration, or gender discrimination occur.”⁴³ Therapists working directly with clients not only deal with people struggling with the feeling of loss, disconnection, and confusion but also see increasing distress due to the transactional pattern that intensifies the situation. The text aims to escape the changing dynamics of family, with lowered marriage rates and different forms of family arrangement. Therefore, the counseling approach must be more flexible so that the clients will adapt to the new social spaces and structures.

There have been other factors that have impacted the family system such as: industrial machines, immigration regulations, criminal justice practices, and how they influence family practices and psychological health.

Family Systems Theory, a helpful tool that helps examine the intricacies of family behaviors and their effects on pastoral care, offers a valuable framework. By combining

⁴³ Patricia J. Pitta and Corinne C. Datchi, eds., *Integrative Couple and Family Therapies: Treatment Models for Complex Clinical Issues* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2019), 88.

observations that characterize historical methods with the family systems theory principles, church leaders will develop more convincing and successful approaches to supporting families in the church community. Just as an illustration, the historical models of pastoral care, which assume that relationships and community support are crucial, correlate with the Family System Theory about the connectedness of the family members within their ecosystem.⁴⁴ Furthermore, it is essential to notice that the content of the FST regarding the patterns of communication, dynamics of feelings, and systemic changes in terms of the family can enhance historical methods of pastoral psychodynamics and spiritual direction. The linkage to historical experiences provides a reservoir of insights and viewpoints essential for modern pastoral care endeavors, and the inclusion of FST acts as a structure responsible for mediating the issues with families pertaining to the church ethos.

Conclusion

In conclusion, exploring pastoral care for non-traditional families through the lens of Family Systems Theory within a church context has been enlightening and enriching. Throughout this interdisciplinary study, we have investigated historical, theological, and psychological aspects of family dynamics and church ministry. The aim is to understand, integrate, and expand our approach to caring for different families within the church community. The changing composition of families in the 21st century creates difficulties and opportunities for pastoral care in religious institutions. However, we have seen that the traditional nuclear model of family has been replaced by a diverse collection of

⁴⁴ Jacob B. Priest, *The Science of Family Systems Theory* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367854591>.

family compositions, including single-parent households, blended families, same-sex partnerships, and extended family structures, amongst others. This shift demands the evolution of church understanding and ministry to family members. Based on the Family Systems Theory, we have received many enlightenments such as the interdependence of family members, family interaction patterns, and systemic factors that significantly influence family functioning. Murray Bowen's trailblazing research has given us a perspective for knowing the intricacies of family life and the effect of the behaviors of an individual on the family system considered as a whole. By recognizing notions like the differentiation of self, emotional fusion, and multigeneration transmission, we have enlightened the picture concerning family patterns, the church's role in maintaining good relationships, and the total development of family members.

The integration of the Biblical Foundations has been a cornerstone for us as we keep our study firmly rooted in both the Bible and Christian theology. Biblical paradigms of family and community have contributed all the same to the sanctity of family relationships, the instrumentals of community life, and the spirit of love and acceptance to all believers. Combining the ideas of the Family Systems model with biblical principles, we have endeavored to create a comprehensive pastoral care mechanism that encompasses psychology and spirituality. Therefore, family-related life issues should be addressed from different perspectives within the church community.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

This project study investigated how to understand and minister effectively to non-traditional families using spiritual skills in the 21st century. Family structures have undergone significant changes in the modern era. I am familiar with and have a history of being raised in a non-traditional upbringing. My mother, a young, divorced parent, raised me. My life shifted from a traditional (nuclear) home to a non-traditional home with a stepfather, and eventually, I had a half-brother born after me. There were missing emotional needs, such as acceptance, fitting in, and the desire for an extended, welcoming, and supportive environment through the church ministry. My grandparents were tremendous helpers to my mother in rearing me.

The journey of researching and addressing this topic was marked by personal and corporate prayer, as well as consultation with my context associates, about one of the challenges we face today that deserves some ministry focus. As a pastor, I have observed numerous non-traditional families within the church. I have also observed the presuppositions and attitudes that people subliminally and overtly display toward one another. I wanted to create a program that would deepen our leaders' perspectives, attitudes, and overall approach to welcome everyone with greater biblical understanding, love, compassion, and inclusivity of our perceptions toward people who may not be like

each other in mindset and lifestyle; moreover, it is important to create a more biblical harmonious Christian church.

The problem within my context is that the church struggles to minister to families because it holds an outdated understanding of what constitutes a family. Caring for the non-traditional family is crucial to the church's ministry and mission. This project enabled participants to attend a six-week symposium on family dynamics and gain skills that helped them minister to the diverse needs of families. As a result of the symposium of educational workshop sessions, the leadership learned how to help, assist, and provide a welcoming atmosphere for all at Ebenezer Baptist Church. The leadership recognized that each participant brought their own presuppositions and biases to the church culture. The participants identified their non-traditional affiliation along with others. I began planning the project in May 2024. I prayed over the design of the project during semester four along with my professional associates and context associates to provide a comprehensive program that would combine biblical understanding, historical perspectives, practical theology, and family systems theory to provide the foundation for equipping church leadership to minister effectively to all family structures, creating a truly welcoming atmosphere for non-traditional families in the contemporary church context. The hypothesis was proven, demonstrating that leadership gained greater skills in understanding family dynamics, identifying presuppositions that foster acceptance of others, applying love beyond biases and judgmentalism, and creating a welcoming atmosphere for all.

Methodology

The project was designed for leadership to participate in a symposium on family dynamics in the 21st Century so they would become equipped and skilled to minister to the unique needs of families in my context. The aim was to prepare church leadership through six workshops/sessions to provide effective spiritual care techniques, a welcoming spirit, and loving attitude without bias by giving a biblical perspective on non-traditional families, a historical foundation, a theological foundation, and an interdisciplinary foundation. The six sessions included a biblical exposition on 1 Samuel 3:1-19. The six-week sessions included pastoral care for families in the church. The sessions also included a workshop on family systems and spirituality, merging clinical perspectives with spiritual insights. Another session incorporated a testimony workshop for non-traditional leaders to share their feelings and experiences through their life sojourn. Finally, the last session included an evangelistic approach to discipleship related to pastoral care to families. All of the sessions were intended to test the hypothesis that if leadership within the context participated in a symposium on the dynamics of family in the 21st Century, then they will be equipped to come away with skills that will help them minister to the needs of the unique family dynamics found in my context.

The problem I addressed and worked toward resolving is that the church experiences difficulty ministering to families in the 21st Century because it possesses an antiquated understanding of what constitutes a family. If families are not biblically skilled and equipped, they cannot minister to the unique needs of the context. The research project used mixed-methods of collecting qualitative and quantitative data to test the hypothesis. Pre- and post-project questionnaires (see Appendix C and D),

demographic questions (see appendix I), group discussion questions (see appendix E), journaling reflections, and final interview questions (see appendix J) were all methods of extrapolating the data. There were two to four discussion questions to discuss feelings and attitudes regarding non-traditional family dynamics. The pre-project questionnaire was handed out to participants on week one and explained. I addressed each question with the participants for clarity. A folder was created for each participant, labeled with their number. The folder included a notebook with the participant's number attached for reflective journaling. I asked each participant to write one paragraph reflecting on the week's material, key takeaways, and personal engagement. Participants were open and candid about their feelings toward the subject matter in their weekly journals. At times during the sessions, participants' body language appeared reserved until they felt comfortable, and then they began to open up in dialogue during the presentation, asking questions. There were three final interview questions to assess what participants thought about the six-week research study. I will delve into this further in the implementation section of this chapter. These three questions were:

Q1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a non-traditional family member?

Q2. What cultural and spiritual practices are important to your family?

Q3. As a result of this symposium, why do you believe we must extend love and care to non-traditional family members?

The pre-project questionnaire set the baseline for the participants' understanding, knowledge, feelings, and actions toward non-traditional church community members at the beginning of the project. The post-assessment questionnaire gleaned the participants' understanding after their participation in the project implementation. Group discussions

allowed for dialogue within the study group and interaction with the material during each session. Personal interviews were held at the end of the workshops to identify how the training impacted them.

The pre-project questionnaire contained demographic questions — one through six. They were ascertained to help understand the participant pool. The aim was to understand the diverse perspectives on the symposium's impact, based on participants' family backgrounds and individual characteristics, including family structure, age, date of birth, gender, ethnicity, and location. Questions seven through thirteen on the pre-project questionnaire were quantitative. These questions examined participants' knowledge surrounding non-traditional families and characteristics of a welcoming spirit. Questions fourteen through eighteen were qualitative and examined participants' feelings and attitudes towards non-traditional family systems and structures.

There were six sessions in total with thirteen participants. We met at a local school, which my context associates spontaneously arranged due to our local church being under renovation. One of my context associates is the dean of students at the Dudley Street Charter School in Boston, Massachusetts. We used the cafeteria space for our six-week sessions. The context associated with the group opened up every session. Every week, people appeared enthusiastically engaged for the duration of the session. During the question-and-answer time, the participants asked the presenters many questions. Snacks were provided for folks during the breaks and rest. The context associates paid close attention to the non-verbal communication of participants who may have been tired or needed a break and cued the moderator to a quick ten-minute break.

Three professional associates collaborated on and delivered my six-week program. They were all consulted three to four months before commencing the program. All three professional associates were in continuous prayer and actively involved in my research study in a valuable way. They were all presenters in the research study. Each professional associate reviewed the IRB and my four foundation chapters to grasp the direction of my project hypothesis and problem within the context. My context associates were beneficial in handling the food being served, assisting each presenter with handouts, collecting participant forms, keeping things organized, taking notes, and recording.

Implementation

My research journey has stemmed from my experience growing up in a non-traditional household. Love was felt in this home; however, some emotional insecurities and challenges stemmed from this environment. The Lord led me to this project to foster a deeper understanding of the shifting dynamics of families in the 21st century and to develop a greater focus on ministry to members of non-traditional family units, creating a more welcoming, caring, non-judgmental, and inclusive environment. These non-traditional individuals want to feel welcomed and loved without prejudice or presuppositions. Six workshops were designed for leaders to develop welcoming skills, pastoral care skills, and learn how to offer unbiased love to others while still holding varying opinions and presuppositions. Overall, the learning objectives from each workshop session led every participant to become more aware of their own bias and move toward welcoming, loving, and caring beyond their comfort zone.

My project took place over six weeks at the Dudley Street Charter School in Boston, Massachusetts. The workshops were held every Saturday at 2 p.m. for six consecutive weeks. We had sufficient chair and desk space for participants to make notes and reflections during the workshops. The goal was to have eight to ten participants, but after the advertisement, the project drew more interest from within the church. I did not want too many people, so I arbitrarily restricted the project to thirteen participants. My context associates passed out the advertisement flyer (see Appendix A) around by word of mouth and distributed it online. It was also announced during worship, stimulating considerable interest and support for the project. Once people showed their interest, they texted the context associate. Then we sent a text message in response to the inquiry to confirm their interest in volunteering. All informed consent forms (see Appendix B) were completed a few weeks before starting the program in March. During the pre-phase of the project being implemented, I had to consult with my context associates about logistics and helping provide food, snacks, and beverages. Additionally, the context associates facilitated the distribution of the presenters' handouts. They kept track of time and assisted me in keeping the workshop running smoothly and on time. They also prayed and read scripture before every session and encouraged that a move of God was always taking place before the learning environment began. Three professional associates served as my presenters for three of the six-week sessions. This was done in a talk-show-like manner. I fielded questions after the material was presented to the participants.

Session One

The six-week program began on Saturday, February 1, 2025, at 2 p.m. I introduced myself and discussed with the participants that it was a joy to have each one of them participate in this project study. I distributed thirteen color-coded folders, labeled one through thirteen, that contained an outline for the overall course (see Appendix G), a writing utensil, a notebook for self-reflective journaling, and note paper for taking notes during classes. I also distributed a pre-assessment questionnaire, which I asked everyone to complete in fifteen minutes. I explained the pre- and post-project questionnaires and their rationale. A participant asked me to go over all the questions with the group. After completing the pre-project questionnaire, I gave a brief overview of the topic, the hypothesis, and the problem statement that would be explored during the project study. I stressed the importance of anonymity of the participants to the individuals. Participation in this program was voluntary, and if anyone felt they wanted to exit the project at any time, they could.

I also informed the participants that we have a standby clinical social worker available if they feel that the material presented has affected anyone or triggered an emotional response. I advised all leader participants that I wanted this to be a safe space, transformational, and educational project exposing the church to a broader concept and way of ministering to the unique family dynamics in the 21st century. Our church needs to develop leaders who display greater *agape* love, an unbiased, welcoming spirit, a pastoral care mindset like Jesus Christ would display to all, and an evangelistic approach to discipleship in the non-traditional family system. After this introduction, I prayed and read the day's scripture. The scripture was 1 Samuel 3:1-19. I told the participants that if

there was one scripture after the six weeks they would know better in the Bible, it would be this one. I asked them to soak and bathe in this scripture and read it every week. We discussed ways the Holy Spirit illuminated this passage to the participants every week as it related to the topic of non-traditional families. Participants extracted new and great truths regarding this text every week. In the first session, I discussed the biblical text, explained the hypothesis and problem statement in the context, and then introduced my four foundational papers. I asked every participant if they had knowledge of the text, and only some had knowledge of this scripture. Others were enlightened by seeing the connection in how God operates in calling and demonstrating His love to all family systems through this text. Participants were highly engaged as we discussed the scripture.

An exposition of 1 Samuel 3:1-19 was explained from the perspective that all types of families matter to God. God's repeated call of Samuel illustrates God's love and patience. We discussed that God's call can involve working to change broken systems, leading to difficult paths. God's call can involve difficult work. We discussed how Samuel was a boy, and his mother, Hannah, entrusted him to Eli to be raised in the temple. Some of the discussion questions and prompts were:

- Define non-traditional.
- How does the topic of non-traditional families relate to your life experience?
- How does the topic of 21st-century non-traditional families relate to the church?
- Does the church have an antiquated view of families today?
- Are we challenged with ministering to them?

This discussion impacted everyone. One person did not even identify themselves as non-traditional; however, based on the definition, they were non-traditional. This participant

stated they were married once, then divorced, and remarried for thirty years, but put that prior relationship out of their mind. Their second marriage was fantastic, but there were issues because she had a child from her brief first marriage, and blended family issues emerged from that. The participant's life shifted from the traditional to the non-traditional. This participant joined the church but initially did not feel comfortable and has been a member for thirty years. As participants explored this subject matter, it was challenging for them to express their true feelings. Still, they began to talk more easily. The participants thought this subject was very relevant to the church because people often have preconceived opinions and biases about lifestyle. We are challenged by how to minister to them because the church has mixed messaging. Participants discussed the verbal and non-verbal body language that people use, which is recognizable by others when communicating their feelings and attitudes towards individuals from non-traditional backgrounds.

Session Two

The second session was held on February 8, 2025. A continuation of the hypothesis, problem statement, and the biblical text was engaged and discussed. The biblical text, 1 Samuel 3:1-19, was explained a second time to the participants from the first session, and they were asked if there were any new spiritual revelations or takeaways after soaking in the text all week. This session delved deeper into the biblical exposition of the family-related text and further discussed the four foundation chapters that undergird the overall project. An explanation of the hypothesis was discussed. An explanation of the problem

statement was discussed with the group as well. The problem I hoped to resolve was that the church experiences difficulty ministering to families in the 21st Century because it possesses an antiquated understanding of what constitutes a family. If families are not biblically skilled and equipped, they cannot minister to the unique needs of the context. I shared with participants the factors that contribute to family decline. The present statistic from Pew Research is that only 62 percent of children live with two married parents, which is an all-time low.¹ A description of the types of families was discussed with the group. I encouraged participants to have a dialogue around these types of non-traditional systems that exist today. During this discussion, participants discussed some other family types that were not stated by the presenter such as inter-racial relationships as a non-traditional family type. One of the participants who was a deacon said that her son was in an inter-racial relationship, and she was having an inter-racial grandchild, while wondering what her comfort level would be in the church.

The second session ended with discussion questions being discussed in a roundtable format with the participants and ended with prayer. The questions are listed below.

- Q1. How does the biblical text of 1 Samuel 3:1-9 speak to communication within the family?
- Q2. Does this biblical text support the voice of God and a greater understanding of God's call to individuals from various family situations?
- Q3. Is God effective at calling us from non-traditional places of life? Why?

¹ Pew Research, "The American Family Today (2015 survey report), December 17, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today>.

Session Three

The third session was held on February 15, 2025. The schedule was interrupted because our LICSW presenter could not be present that day, so I had to reschedule her for March 1st. We began praying, read our project's biblical foundation text, 1 Samuel 3:1-19, and briefly discussed any new relevant insights for the past week. We tackled the shared testimonies from a few leaders within the group who shared their non-traditional stories. This was a day for our leaders to share and examine their own lives with others so that others could empathize and respect that everyone has their sojourn. We had four personal testimonies shared by individuals. Two were from the group, and two were outside the group. The first outside presenter was a local pastor who shared his testimony. He was a non-traditional family member who grew up in a home with a stepfather. He talked about his longing for family and the absence of a parent. He also said that often he had no one to talk to about his true feelings about home life. He is a single pastor and discussed the dynamics of being a pastor in a pastoral role. He also asked the participants to voice other non-traditional family characters in the Bible besides Eli and Samuel, whom God utilized. Responses from participants were Queen Esther and Mordecai, (Mordecai adopted Queen Esther), Moses from the Nile River, who was raised by Pharaoh's daughter, and Jesus himself, who Mary and Joseph raised.

The next outside presenter was a professional associate who discussed her role as a grandchild raised by her grandmother. She discussed the awful story, pain, and agony of her mother being taken away from her by her father. She told the participants in the group that she could not understand why such a loving, caring, and beautiful woman would be taken from this world. The presenter explained that her father killed her mother,

and as a result, she became a part of a non-traditional family. Someone in the group asked her how she forgave her father. She said forgiveness had to be on her terms. This horrific but compelling life story moved some in the group to tears. By the body language and sighs, you could tell that some in the room knew they had trials and tribulations, but they were thankful that their story might not have been as bad. This reinforced the importance of having a welcoming and loving heart toward everyone, without bias, because life has not been fair to many of us. God's word is filled with divine skills of expressing love and holy sacrifice for us.

The next presenter from within the group was the chairman of the deacon board. He shared his testimony. He said that he was adopted and explained the dynamics of being adopted from a foster home. He explained that he was abused as a foster child and was taken in by a beautiful family that loved him and cared for him. They developed him into a great person of faith. However, these feelings of being adopted and searching for his biological parents were always a quest for him. He shared how he grew up in a non-traditional setting and always felt somewhat out of place, while his needs were always met. He always needed to feel welcomed and loved, like there was a hole in his life every day. People were shocked and amazed at this testimony and praised God for His deliverance and for how God has held his life together amid his complicated sojourn.

The last presenter of this day shared that a step-parent raised her. She shared that her mom had a child before her father and mother's marriage but did not know that until they were teenagers. She never knew that she was non-traditional as a child until much later. She explained that her father's and mother's families were broken and non-traditional. She explained that her parents kept their marriage problems quiet but that they

ended up getting divorced. She said that her family was from Alabama, and they kept secrets. She said that her parents' divorce caused significant problems for the children. She said her mother became a single parent of three children. The police were called to the house on one occasion, which was the stimulus for the presenter's problems. The presenter's mother stated that her father was on drugs, and her mother could not take it any longer, so she ended up leaving her father. The well-together family now became very different. The mom became a single parent, which was too much for her.

The presenter was raised by her grandmother. The presenter became very experimental with the world and life during this time. These shared testimonies created a sense of empathy among the leadership group. These presenters who allowed themselves to become vulnerable recognized that they are not the only ones in the church with rough paths. We are all equal in God's eyes and are all flawed and have all traveled different pathways. Everyone agreed that this is why everyone should have a welcoming, caring, and loving spirit: everyone has had a unique walk and story about their life. The participants also recognized that they did not know anything about each other to this degree but have been in the same church for years. This session became liberating and healing for all participants. We closed the session with tremendous tears of encouragement and support for all the participants and prayer. Discussion questions were discussed. Time became an issue, and the Holy Spirit was moving, so we began discussing these questions and finished the discussion the following week.

Session Four

The fourth session, held on February 22, 2025, focused on Pastoral Care for Families in the church. Before the guest presenter spoke, the participants were so charged from the prior week that they wanted to revisit the testimonies and finish the preceding week's discussion. The presenter was a pastor from the Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Hackensack, New Jersey. He provided an outline that supported his PowerPoint presentation (see appendix F). He focused on the topic of Welcome to the Bizzaro World. The Bizzaro metaphor uses Superman as an illustration. The Bizzaro World is a place where truth is falsehood, wisdom is foolishness, and reality is distorted. He discussed the theological parallel whereby many reject truth, depth, and theological integrity today, choosing emotionalism and misinformation instead. His overarching theme was understanding pastoral care in a world of distortions, and how to provide pastoral care in a world of distortions.

He discussed the landscape of ministry in a Bizarro World. He examined the impact of anti-intellectualism, post-modernism, and post-pandemic shifts on pastoral leadership. The growing challenge of misinformation, digital distractions, and theological superficiality was also addressed. He discussed observation points of the Bizzaro (metaphor) contrast: that is Post-Pandemic versus Post-modern Ministry. Post-Pandemic Ministry calls for the search for stability, including the shift to hybrid worship and reduced in-person engagement. He underscored the rise in mental health challenges and pastoral fatigue. Another observation point that he discussed was how digital ministry can be a blessing or a distraction and how TikTok and YouTube shape theology. Post-modern ministry – the struggle for truth and how truth is no longer subjective – can be

both personal yet biblical. He discussed how we distrust institutions: science, government, and pastoral leadership.

The workshop culminated in providing Pastoral Care in a Bizarro World (a world of distortion). Our families and our society suffer from all types of merging distortions. One of the distortions is the age of providing pastoral care in the age of the Anti-Intellect. He stated three levels of pastoral care applicable today: 1) Pastoral Care in the age of Anti-intellect; 2) Pastoral Care for the Individual; and 3) Pastoral Care for the pastor. He provided a working definition of pastoral care. “Pastoral care is the compassionate, theological, and intellectual shepherding of individuals and communities toward holistic spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth.”² Pastoral care involves guidance, healing, teaching, and discipleship to nurture faith amid uncertainty and cultural confusion. He charged the participants to understand that effective pastoral care in this era requires wisdom, biblical literacy, and critical engagement with misinformation and theological distortions. He gave some marvelous quotes from Black theologians on theological depth. The participants were engaged due to his illustration, which made the pastoral care presentation practical. The engagement was noticeable through verbal and non-verbal communication. Some of the quotes that he shared with the group are:

- Howard Thurman – “Do not be silent; there is no limit to the power that may be released through you.”
- James Cone – “Theology is not an intellectual enterprise but a prophetic calling to speak the word of God.”
- Katie Cannon – “Even in the face of distortions, we must tell the truth about God, justice, and hope.

² Definition of pastoral care given by the presenter who did not give the sources, only the authors’ name.

- Willie James Jennings – “Theological education must resist cultural captivity and reclaim deep engagement with truth.”³

We concluded with prayer, song, and a discussion from his lecture with these two questions: What is one tangible step that you can take to reclaim depth and truth in your ministry? How do you maintain your theological integrity and self-care while leading in an intellectual culture?

Session Five

The fifth session was held on March 1, 2025. The presenter was a licensed independent clinical social worker (LICSW) and an assistant pastor at Morning Star Baptist Church in Boston, Massachusetts. She provided an outline that supported the dialogue and presentation (see appendix H). The presenter discussed three categories of social work practice and pastoral care. The three levels of clinical pastoral care practice were the 1st Micro level, 2nd Mezzo level, and 3rd Macro level. She described how clinical care and pastoral care intersect.

The presenter opened up with a personal testimony of how she got “saved” and was led to Jesus Christ. Her husband was saved and churched, but she was Roman Catholic and not saved. Her husband would bring her to a Baptist Church on Sundays as a visitor. She used to wear these short miniskirts to church to look cute, and people would stare at her strangely, but her husband never judged her or said anything. Until one day, the Lord convicted her to ask her husband whether she looked out of place at church. And the husband responded, You already know the answer. The Lord convicted her and she

³ Though these are direct quotes from different writer, the presenter did not give the sources, only the authors’ name.

went down the aisle one day to give herself to Jesus Christ. The presenter profoundly used this as an icebreaker to draw the participants into being non-judgmental and allowing the Holy Spirit to do the work of the change process.

The presenter discussed the Micro level, which addresses individual and small group interactions such as counseling, therapy, and direct support services. Social workers at this level work closely with clients to assess needs, provide resources, and facilitate personal change. She stated that the relationship to pastoral care often operates at a micro level providing one-on-one support, counseling, spiritual guidance, prayer, and scripture support to individuals, building trust, fellowship, and community.

The second Mezzo level involves working with groups, families, and communities. This may include facilitating support groups, community organizing, and family therapy. The goal is to enhance group dynamics, foster community connections, and strengthen community and church relationships.

The third Macro level involves systematic change, policy advocacy, and community development. Social workers at this level address societal issues and work towards improving social conditions through legislation and broader initiatives. The urban church, particularly the Black pastors, have been historically active in this area.

The presenter gave three scriptures for participants to retain and meditate upon.

- (1 John 4:7) “Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God.”
- (2 Corinthians 1:4) “Who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort which we ourselves are comforted by God.”
- (1 Peter 4:10) “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

The presenter described six kinds of folks who are a part of our congregations. 1) Regular folks, 2) Accountable folks, 3) Responsible folks, 4) Searchers, 5) Staunch and Steadfast folks, and 6) Just Beyond folks (behaviors that are difficult to deal with).

The presenter gave practical approaches and truths to effective pastoral care techniques with present-day examples and illustrations that participants could relate to and understand. The presenter made a memorable remark to participants that folks commented on at the end. She said that we should all be like incense; you cannot see it, but you can smell it, and it smells good. One of the comments that came up during this impressive workshop was that people are seeking, and they say, often, “I don’t go to church, but I am spiritual.” The presenter noted that people want the real you, not a representative, in providing pastoral care. We must approach pastoral care in a universal spirit of welcome, healing, and compassion, while avoid being silently judgmental. We discussed the following questions: Q1. Describe how the testimony from other leaders from non-traditional families affected you? Q2. In what ways do you think the concept of family will continue to evolve in the future, particularly regarding non-traditional family models?

Session Six

The final workshop was on March 8, 2025. During this session, we worked within time constraints, which caused the session to run slightly over; however, with the group's permission, the participants completed the post-project questionnaire and the personal exit interview. We had some time to fit in discussion questions at the end.

The presenter was a professor from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, the Director of Christian Education, and a minister at Morning Star Baptist Church. He provided an outline that supported his PowerPoint presentation. He presented on the topic of evangelism to 21st Century Families. He presented on evangelism in a post-pandemic world. He entitled the Evangelism Presentation “Go” (see appendix K).

The presenter focused on Matthew 28:16-20 as the scriptural foundation for the session. He provided an outline that supported his PowerPoint presentation. I will give some highlights of the presentation. The format for his presentation was structured around three areas of general concentration: 1) textual foundations, 2) theological musings, and 3) The Path Forward: Praxis. He discussed that the term, the Great Commission, is a later theological designation rather than something explicitly found in Matthew 28:16-20. He describes Jesus’ Universal Authority in the text and the use of HIS words “I am with you.” He did an exegesis of the text. The presentation stated that we are called to be “Grounded in Discipleship while engaging Evangelistically.” The presenter discussed with everyone the action of going, which is for all of us to participate as believers and do God’s work daily to reach others with the love of Christ, with inclusivity. He encouraged everyone, scripturally speaking, to take a multigenerational approach that includes Intergenerational Worship, Intergenerational Learning, Cross-Generational Relationships, Multigenerational Leadership, Inclusive Communication, and Generational Awareness. He addressed balancing faith with modern realities, which include addressing mental health concerns, embracing digital engagement, fostering connections, flexible worship experiences, and inclusive outreach. The presentation advised us as disciples to expressly participate in community engagement and expand the

ministry beyond the church walls, including childcare and parenting support, youth engagement, community meal programs, skill-building workshops, senior outreach, and community partnerships. I asked the group discussion questions at the end of the workshop.

- Q1. What resources are available for non-traditional families?
- Q2. Do you feel more comfortable as a result of this training, sharing your non-traditional family experience?
- Q3. How do factors such as race, socio-economic status, and gender identity intersect with non-traditional family structures?
- Q4. As a result of this training, do you see yourself and all others as very important to God, regardless of their non-traditional family status?

Summary of Learning

This section evaluates all pre- and post-project questionnaires' responses, focused journaling, personal interviews, and discussions obtained from thirteen participants who participated in a symposium whose main goal was instructing church leaders regarding effective ministry to diverse family systems.

The contemporary church faces challenges in adapting to the diverse family structures of 21st-century society. 21st-century family sketches continue to evolve, but church leadership maintains outdated family ideas that do not recognize all current household patterns in modern communities. The church excludes from its “family” definition all unconventional family structures, which encompass cohabiting couples, single-parent households, and LGBTQ+ families.

As part of this research, I investigated why the church faces difficulties meeting family needs because it preserves outdated conceptions of family. This symposium-based

targeted educational intervention aimed to equip church leaders with the necessary tools for more effective outreach to families of varying structures within their community. The analysis gleaned from this project assessed both quantitative and qualitative data, which exhibited growth in participants' knowledge and transformation in their attitudes and perceptions of capabilities in family ministry. The collected data proved the hypothesis and highlighted its implications for modern church ministry. The pre-project questionnaire provided the best trend for data for all the other data collections. The data used in the summary of learning to bring the project to conclusion was a pre-and post-project questionnaire, journals, discussions, and personal interviews. The discussions helped with the implementation but were not the most substantial data collection. There were three personal interview questions, and these were the overall results.

- Q1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a non-traditional family member? All participants had nothing else to share at the end of the six-week symposium. Participants said they covered everything in surveys and journals.
- Q2. What cultural and spiritual practices are important to your family? Most participants said that prayer was important to family and to growing spiritually. All participants had a desire to become better disciples.
- Q3. As a result of this symposium, why do you believe we must extend love and care to non-traditional family members? All participants, in general, stated in so many words that displaying the skill set of love, compassion, and outreach – regardless of background – is the key ingredient to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They also stated that love must stretch beyond bias to create a favorable and overall welcoming environment.

Journal Entries

The journal entries contain qualitative data. Here is the data for week one from participants 1 through 13. The comments and takeaways were very insightful. What follows is a summary of the participants' responses.

- Most people learned that churches have more non-traditional families than traditional ones. People discovered and recognized many different family systems, including inter-racial, LGBTQ, single-parent families, etc.
- Participants commented that they became more aware of family types. Participants commented about how many times these non-traditional families are stigmatized and carry with them a particular perception of bias. The common goal is for Christians to be more intentional concerning their welcoming attitudes and spirits beyond their bias.
- All participants commented that leaders must meet people's needs, so they do not feel like outcasts. Leadership must be intentional in action, engaging, teaching, training, and welcoming attitudes toward non-traditional families in a loving, caring, and empathetic way.

The journal entries also describe how some people exhibit certain behaviors when they first enter the church that are perceived as unwelcoming.

The journal entries for week two from participants 1 through 13 are listed below.

- All participants commented that they learned more biblical supporting evidence that God used plenty of non-traditional characters in the Bible to accomplish HIS perfect will and to do remarkable things. God used Esther, an orphan, raised by Mordecai. God used the life of Moses, a Hebrew, raised by an Egyptian.
- Jesus Christ, divinely implanted into the womb of Mary, was raised by Joseph and Mary in a non-traditional home. All participants never realized the non-traditional family dynamic between Mary, Jesus, and Joseph.
- All participants were unaware of the story and meaning behind 1 Samuel 3:1-19 between Hannah, Eli the priest, and Samuel. Eli was not Samuel's biological father, but the priest Eli raised him.

Participants learned stories that were unfamiliar to them in the scriptures to discern and pull out biblical truths and life application understanding. The participants also noted that

learning to discern God's voice in family matters was important. Participants also commented that God accepts nontraditional families and those who comprise that dynamic. God creates the dynamic for His purpose and will to be done.

The journal entries for week three from participants 1 through 13 are listed below.

- All participants commented that they were visibly emotional because of the vulnerability of testimonials shared by their peer leaders in the group.
- All participants shared that the four guest presenters allowed each person to realize that they are not alone in the audience of the church.
- The four presenters who shared allowed others to understand that everyone has a unique story about their life. Participants commented that life has significant complexities, but God has played an essential part. One participant noted that she initially felt very uncomfortable with this one session, but then the Holy Spirit calmed her fears, and she was healed through this process of intense sharing.

All other participants stated that the experience was a good one. Every participant noted that we all hold onto things that hurt us concerning our family.

The journal entries for week four from participants 1 through 13 are listed below.

- Participants noted that the information was relevant to today's church and how to apply pastoral care.
- Participants highlighted that people must find ways to meaningfully be relevant and welcoming to a generation that does not think the same about how to do church.
- All participants recognized that the presenter focused on distortions and church folks became sidetracked with a distorted viewpoint instead of biblical truth.
- Participants noted that there is a widening gap between colorism, racism, distorted lies, emotions, and perspectives.
- All participants indicated that churches must find ways to draw, welcome, engage, and meet people where they are.

The journal entries confirmed that people recognize that we all have various opinions and presuppositions about lifestyle and issues, but that Jesus Christ is the perfect example of

whom we should follow. All participants noted that church leaders should apply good pastoral care to assist the pastor in making a strong body of believers.

The journal entries for week five from participants 1 through 13 are listed below.

- One participant said they related most to this session because of the saved LICSW spiritual testimony. This reminded her of how she came to the Lord.
- All participants agreed that this presentation was excellent due to the practicality of the information provided and explained.
- All participants agreed that leaders must do all they can to not display obvious judgmental tendencies or biases toward folks.
- Participants noted in their journals that they enjoyed the similarities between pastoral care and social work.
- 100% of participants indicated that mental health was not discussed in the Black church or within our families, and the resources were limited.

This session spoke to the participants' hearts because they said the presenter appeared personal with her application of pastoral care. Participants also noted that everyone has to look beyond behaviors and develop these skills to identify the need, listen, be authentic, loving, empathetic, encouraging, and cultivate compassion.

The journal entries for week six from participants 1 through 13 are listed below.

- All participants stated in the final session that Matthew 28:16-20 was an eye-opening passage.
- Participants felt that the presenter did a great job explaining the depth of discipleship. All participants noted in their respective journals that the combination of academic and the presence of the Holy Spirit was sensed in each session.
- Participants felt that evangelism covers all aspects of discipleship toward the world.
- Participants stated that people must feel love from the church, or they will withdraw, and the message of Jesus Christ will not break through to people's hearts.

All participants discussed with the lecturer that there are influencers in our lives and that we all have the influence to spread the word of God. All participants developed a new understanding that technology today is a way of discipleship. Participants noted that discipleship is not easy, but it is about perspective.

Pre- and Post-Project Questionnaire Results

Demographic Overview (Q1-Q6)

Understanding the participant pool is essential for interpreting the results. The thirteen respondents represented a range of family experiences, ministry backgrounds, and demographic characteristics. This provided diverse perspectives on the symposium's impact.

Current Family Structure (Q1)

The pre-project questionnaire revealed that 38% (5 out of 13) of participants identified as part of traditional nuclear families (married heterosexual couples with biological children), while the majority, 62% (8 out of 13), reported involvement in various non-traditional family structures. Following the symposium, the percentage identifying as traditional decreased to 31% (4 out of 13), suggesting either a reconceptualization of family identity or increased comfort in acknowledging non-traditional family forms. Notably, cohabitation identification increased by 8% (1 out of 13), indicating reduced stigma around this family form. This shift in identification suggests that the symposium prompted participants to reflect on their personal and

professional definitions of family, pushing them toward a broader, more inclusive understanding. The table below, Current Family Structure Identification, gives the breakdown of the participants' understanding.

Structure	Pre-Assessment (%)	Post-Assessment (%)	Change (%)
Traditional	38	31	-7
Cohabitation	15	23	+8
Same-Sex Family	8	8	0
Step-Parent Home	15	15	0
Divorced	15	15	0
Other	9	8	-1

Table 1. Current Family Structure Identification

Family Structure During Childhood (Q2)

The participants' childhood family experiences showed similar diversity. While 54% (7 out of 13) reported being raised in traditional nuclear families during the pre-symposium, this number decreased to 46% (6 out of 13) in the post-project questionnaire, with corresponding increases in single-parent (from 23% (3 out of 13) to 31% (4 out of 13)) and grandparent-led (from 8% (1 out of 13) to 15% (2 out of 13)) family acknowledgments. This shift suggests the symposium prompted deeper reflection on the diversity of childhood family experiences and their relevance to ministerial practices. Recognizing non-traditional family forms in the context of participants' upbringing contributed to their ability to empathize with diverse families and their ministerial needs.

Age, Gender, and Ethnicity (Q3-Q5)

The participant pool skewed toward middle-aged and older adults with 62% of participants being female and 38% male. Ethnically, 85% of the participants identified as African-American. This demographic composition suggests that participants were not only influenced by their personal experiences of family structures but also by the cultural, social, and historical contexts of their respective congregations.

Quantitative Analysis (Q7-Q12)

The quantitative questions demonstrated substantial changes in participants' awareness and understanding of contemporary family issues following the symposium. These questions focused on recognizing different family structures and understanding legal developments. An increased awareness of societal trends was also noted.

Q7: Welcoming Spirit in Church

Responses regarding what constitutes a welcoming church environment for non-traditional families showed remarkable development. In the pre-project questionnaire, only 7% (1 out of 13) of participants selected "All of the Above" (caring, friendly, engaging, and pleasant) as the characteristics of a welcoming church. Post-symposium, this number rose to 62% (8 out of 13), reflecting a 55% (7 out of 13) increase in participants' conception of what it means for a church to be welcoming. This shift suggests a significant expansion in participants' understanding of hospitality and inclusion, demonstrating that they now recognize a broader, more inclusive range of behaviors necessary to create a welcoming environment for all families. The table listed

below, Welcoming Church Characteristics, gives a breakdown of the characteristics discussed.

Response	Pre-Assessment (%)	Post-Assessment (%)	Change (%)
Caring & Friendly	62	85	+23
Engaging	23	38	+15
Pleasant	8	15	+7
All of the Above	7	62	+55

Table 2. Welcoming Church Characteristics

Q8-Q10: Family Structure Identification

The questions testing participants' ability to correctly identify various family structures showed consistent improvement:

- Single Parenthood (Q8): Knowledge of single-parent households improved from 69% (9 out of 13) to 92% (12 out of 13), indicating a 23% (3 out of 13) increase in correct recognition of this family form.
- Same-Sex Marriage Legalization (Q9): In 2015, awareness of the federal legalization of same-sex marriage rose from 38% (5 out of 13) to 77% (10 out of 13), a 39% (5 out of 13) increase.
- Cohabitation (Q10): Recognition of cohabiting couples increased from 54% (7 out of 13) to 85% (11 out of 13), a 31% (4 out of 13) increase.

These gains indicate that the symposium successfully enhanced participants' capacity to recognize and name diverse family configurations, a crucial step in ministerial response.

Q11: Demographic Trends Awareness

When asked about statistical trends regarding traditional families in America, understanding improved significantly. Correct identification of the decline of conventional nuclear families rose from 46% (6 out of 13) to 77% (10 out of 13), while incorrect assumptions about increasing traditional families dropped from 23% (3 out of 13) to 8% (1 out of 13). This shift suggests that the symposium gave participants a more accurate, data-informed perspective on contemporary family demographics.

Q12: LGBTQ+ Terminology

Only 54% (7 out of 13) of participants in the pre-symposium could accurately define LGBTQ+. By the post-project questionnaire, 92% (12 out of 13) provided complete, accurate definitions, demonstrating substantially improved familiarity with this essential terminology. This shift is significant as understanding LGBTQ+ terminology is crucial for inclusive ministry and for addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ families within church communities. Participants recognize that families are taking on new shapes. Participants are also learning the proper societal labels and granting this population respect and dignity. Therefore, this is making the body of Christ not refer to old slang societal terms toward this population but valuing it and their citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

Pre- and Post-Project Questionnaire

The graph below demonstrates the transformation of participant knowledge and tendencies during the symposium period. The answers for the pre- and post-project

questionnaires for six crucial areas demonstrates that participants gained increased understanding and awareness about modern family patterns. Participants significantly increased their selection of “All of the Above” characteristics for a welcoming church by 55% during the Q7 response assessment. The score on Single Parenthood (Q8) increased by 23% in identification accuracy, and the score on Same-Sex Marriage Legalization (Q9) rose by 39%. Graphical data indicates that the symposium promoted participants’ understanding of different family structures and legal developments, which supports the research assumption that specialized educational efforts lead to better awareness and more positive attitudes about diverse family structures.

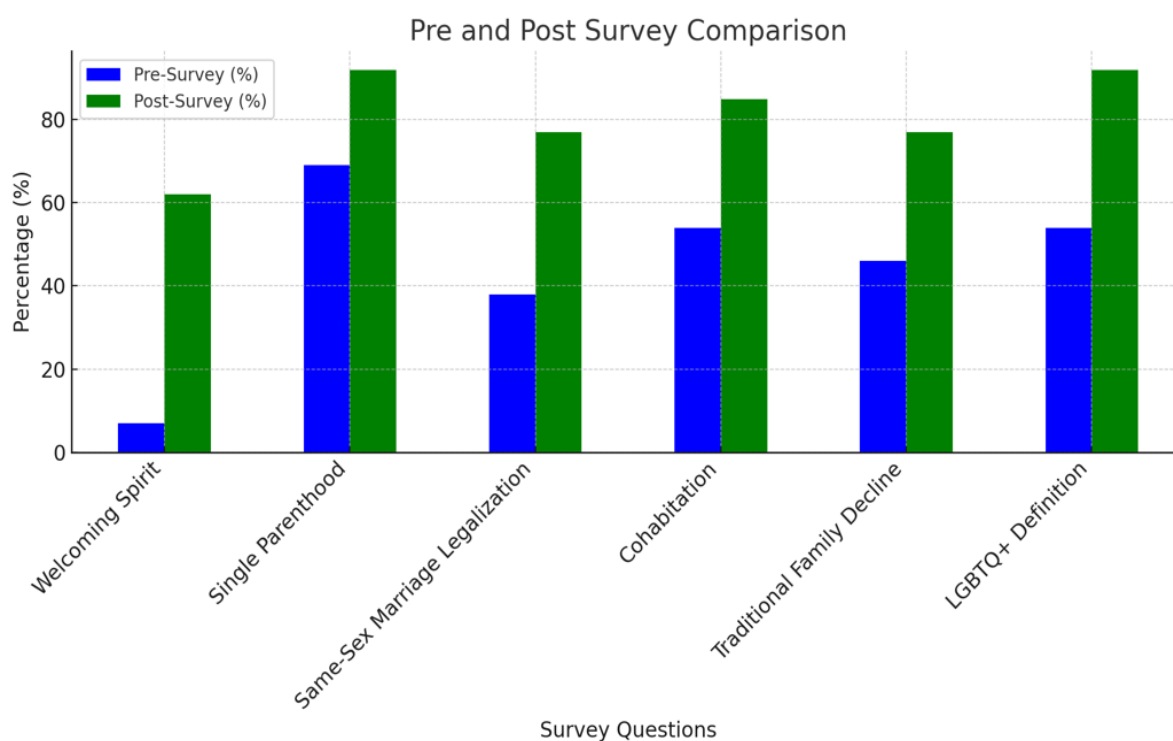


Figure 1. Pre- and Post- Project Questionnaire Results

Qualitative Analysis (Q13-Q18)

The questionnaires' open-ended questions revealed profound shifts in participants' theological reflections, cultural awareness, and ministerial approaches. Toward the end of the six weeks, people tended to view non-traditional with less of a stigma and in a less damaging and judgmental way. Participants also recognized each person's opportunity, regardless of family status, to be a vessel for God's use and glory. Participants noted that many family systems and structures exist today, but God can utilize whom He chooses. The participants stated that the biblical text was more understandable and relevant to everyday life as a disciple. Participants commented that all cultures differ in family views, but God views everyone equally and does not respect persons. At the end of the symposium, per the data, participants commented that they truly have a broader, more tolerant, and loving view and must meet people where they are. The most common comment from participants was that everyone must use the skill of compassion in every opportunity to minister to others.

Q13-Q14: Biblical Understanding of Non-Traditional Families

Before the symposium, responses often reflected uncertainty or limited biblical framing. For instance, many participants stated that the Bible advocates "love" without specific references to Scripture. After the symposium, participants demonstrated more engagement with Scripture. They referenced particular narratives such as the story of Samuel and Eli (1 Samuel 3:1-19) and the inclusive ministry of Jesus to outcasts. These responses showed a deeper understanding of how biblical teachings can inform contemporary ministry to diverse family structures.

Q15-Q16: Cultural Competency

Most pre-project participants presented non-traditional families as issues or cultural exceptions. After the event concluded, symposium participants showed better awareness of both obstacles and benefits that exist within different family structures. Many participants demonstrated an expert understanding of how societal background elements modify how families live their lives. The symposium demonstrated its ability to develop cultural competency skills in participants who will provide better pastoral care to diverse communities. Many participants began to overlook their individual perceived issues like growing up as a foster child, being adopted, being a single parent, being an early teenage parent, having a loving grandmother who reared you up, being a divorcee or remarried with a new family, or an inter-racial family. By the end of the symposium, people share a more positive view of themselves and how one can find purpose and true confidence in themselves through God.

Q17: Resource Awareness

The symposium exposed participants to a comprehensive set of knowledge regarding support networks that assist families. After the survey, respondents mentioned specific support services that included Catholic Charities, Action Based Community Development (ABCD), Salvation Army, Boston Family Services, other social services, and Boston Medical Center. Most pre-project questionnaire respondents selected the answer option of “Don’t know” when participating. The symposium achieved its objective of expanding participants’ knowledge about community resources that serve diverse families because their perception of these resources changed.

Q18: Personal Views on Non-Traditional Families

The symposium resulted in participants showing substantial changes regarding their reported readiness to work with diverse families. Participants who participated before the symposium remained hesitant with their responses regarding cultural differences, yet they shifted to adopt concrete methods for delivering inclusive ministry services after the workshops. The shift in practices shows that the symposium provided positive outcomes. Participants at the end of the symposium had less fear about sharing their non-traditional testimonies and found confidence in their ability to be more of a witness toward others.

Hypothesis Evaluation

Statistical evidence validates that the symposium provided the necessary knowledge and skills that prepared church leaders to serve modern families. The participants showed substantial advancement in all assessment areas, including knowledge base, attitudes, and personal ministry competency. The symposium demonstrated significant achievement through participants' enhanced ability to understand laws about same-sex marriage and develop emotional skills like showing compassion toward all non-traditional families and alternative lifestyles.

Conclusion

The research gleaned through this study and project found that purposeful strategies have effectively built church leaders' competence in ministering to today's families. As evidenced through both surveys, the symposium has successfully achieved

its objectives. Through both pre- and post-project questionnaires, participants have improved their understanding, changed their perspectives, and become more practical. The participants showed the most significant progression through their deepened comprehension of single-parent households, cohabiting couples, LGBTQ+ families, and same-sex marriage legalization legal matters.

The participants demonstrated substantial transformation regarding their perspective on building an inclusive church atmosphere based on the qualitative data from the focused journals, pre- and post-project questionnaires, and personal interviews. The symposium resulted in participants recognizing church hospitality through changed perceptions concerning inclusivity; therefore, they selected “All of the Above” as the defining characteristic of an inviting church more often by 55%. Church leaders are willing to establish broad and inclusive church environments because of this essential change. Ministry safeguards should be put in place to create a favorable environment.

Research participants’ enhanced understanding demonstrated why church leaders need access to resources that support their learning and response to contemporary evolving family dynamics. Several significant constraints need understanding. The use of too many discussion questions could have been minimized. Analysis became less reliable due to the small number of participants (thirteen) because, as the researcher, I could not extend the results to other population groups. Participants may have been influenced by social desirability bias while reporting data because they wanted to present information that was considered socially acceptable. A long-term assessment of how symposium participation influenced ministry practices should be conducted in future research. This

would help us understand how new knowledge and attitudes affect ministry work in church contexts.

Future research should consider an enlarged and culturally diverse group of church leadership while spanning an extended period to monitor enduring behavioral modifications. The symposium should develop extra educational modules focusing on selected family structures, including blended households, immigrant families, and family members across different economic circumstances. Research conducted over time would help show the impact of knowledge development and attitude shifts on the ministry practices used by church leaders.

Churches seeking to remain relevant can develop effective implementation strategies based on the insights gained from this research project. Church leadership needs support in stimulating their ministries with inclusive actions while organizing ongoing educational programs about diverse family structures and support networks for families outside traditional norms. Implementing these guidelines helps churches achieve their target of supporting diverse families in their community. This topic and project can be expanded to other local churches and, if administered at conventions, or perhaps even turned into a book, would allow for greater thinking by church pastors and leaders on how to create a stronger, unbiased, welcoming environment for my context and our churches.

APPENDIX A
EVENT INVITATION LETTER

Event Invitation Letter

Rev. Carl B. Thompson
Ebenezer Baptist Church

My name is Rev. Carl Thompson, and I am doctoral student at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. My doctoral thesis/project is titled "Pastoral Care for Non-Traditional Families in the Twenty First Century." The aim of this work is to provide an excellent opportunity for adult leaders to develop skills to assist the pastor in being trained in creating a welcoming, more loving, and accepting environment for non-traditional families in the church. The Pastoral Care Program for leaders is being held from February 1st, 2025 through March 8th, 2025, on Saturdays from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. The program window to sign up is from January 1st through January 26th. The program is designed for six weeks. The pastor will administer this program. The program is open to the first ix to ten adult leaders to participate.

We are reaching out to invite you to participate in this research. Your insights and experiences in non-traditional families would provide valuable contributions to our study. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and will involve interviews, pre- and post-project questionnaires, individual focused journaling, and group discussions. The time commitment will be approximately two hours per session.

Your involvement will help increase knowledge and attitudes toward creating a more welcoming environment toward non-traditional families in the church. All data collected will be treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes. The pastor has selected a deacon/officer in charge of notifying leadership of the opportunity through public worship announcements, flyers, emailing, and church website. If interested, please contact Deacon Sam Campbell at 978-668-4153 or email the church at info@ebenezerbcbaptist.org.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to important research in Pastoral Care to Non-Traditional Families in the Twenty First Century. We look forward to the possibility of your participation.

Sincerely,

Rev. Carl B. Thompson Pastor
Ebenezer Baptist Church 978-668-4154

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am conducting a research study as part of my dissertation project in partial fulfillment of my Doctor of Ministry at United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Research Title: Pastoral Care to Twenty-First-Century Non-Traditional Families

Project Director: Reverend Carl B. Thompson. Contact email: cthompson1@united.edu

Purpose of Study:

This is a consent form for potential participants eighteen years or older. You have an option to take part in a research study on the efficacy of training leaders on the dynamics of family in the 21st Century. The goals of this form are to give you information about the study if you choose to take part and to help you decide if you want to be in the study.

Name of participant:

_____ Please print
first & last name

Please read and initial each section below.

(Your initials indicate you have read and understand each section.)

The Research Project

_____ This project addresses a training model for leaders to become equipped on the modern understanding of family within 21st Century Context at Ebenezer Baptist Church of Boston. The research question is: If leadership within the context participate in a symposium on the dynamics of family in the 21st Century, then they will be equipped to come away with skills that will help them minister to the needs of the unique family dynamics found in my context.

Expectations of the Human Research Subject

_____ After my consent to participate in the study, I will complete a Pastoral Care Non-Traditional Family Pre-Project Questionnaire that will provide initial input for the project. Each week over the six weeks, I will attend, participate in the group discussions, write focused journals, complete quizzes, and interviews. At the proposed time, I will complete a Non-Traditional Family Post-Project Questionnaire that will provide data for the project.

Consent

_____ I agree to participate in this project as a human research subject. I understand that at any point in this project I can withdraw my participation without explanation. I

understand that if I elect to withdraw my participation it will have no effect on my membership or leadership responsibility at Ebenezer Baptist Church of Boston. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation as a human research subject for this project.

Confidentiality

_____ I understand that this consent form, pre- and post-project questionnaire and other collected data will be maintained and stored in strict compliance with confidentiality by Reverend Carl B. Thompson at Ebenezer Baptist Church of Boston. All electronic data will be deleted and will be destroyed after the final examination of the dissertation.

Risks for Human Research Subjects

_____ I do not foresee any risks in taking part of this research. I understand that my responses will be covered in anonymity and no one will be able to deduce from my responses my exact identity. If the project director choses to use quotes from my feedback, it will be anonymous. My contributions to the study will be safeguarded from public view for the duration of the study.

_____ I plan to audio record discussions from each table through an audio recorder. Participants may be identified by their voice. However, I will not use these audio recordings for any purpose other than data processing. They will not be shared in the future and participants will be notified in the consent form prior to participating. This audio will be immediately deleted after results of data are evaluated.

Benefits of the Study

_____ I understand that the benefits of participating in this research would be to develop a better understanding and deeper relationship with Jesus and His Church through church leaders developing a modern understanding of family in the 21st Century and creating a welcoming atmosphere for all. Also, the participants of the study group will have opportunities each week to build relationships, increase knowledge, and nurture one another in the faith.

_____ I agree to join this study and I offer my participation voluntarily and without coercion.

Contact: I am aware that I can contact the researcher, Reverend Carl Thompson, for answers to questions related to this study directly at telephone: 617-637-3656 or via email at cthompson1@united.edu

I have read the contents of this consent form and I have received verbal explanations to all the questions I had and were answered to my satisfaction. I agree that by signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read, understand and agree with the terms as a

volunteer to participate in this study. Even though this consent form bears my signature, I understand I have the right to withdraw entirely without explanation and at any time.

Signature (Volunteer) Date

Researcher Signature Date

APPENDIX C
PRE-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre-Project Questionnaire

Demographics:

Q1. What type of family structure are you a part of now as an adult? Please circle if listed or explain.

A) Traditional (husband and wife and their biological children); B) Cohabitation; C) Same-Sex Family; D) LGBTQ; E) Step-Parent Home; F) Foster Care; G) Adoptee H) Divorced; I) Other Explain _____

Q2. What type of family structure were you raised in as a child and teenager? Please explain _____

Q3. What is your Date of Birth?

Q4. Gender type M or F or other, specify?

Q5. What ethnicity are you? African-American, White, Asian, Latino, etc....

Q6. What city, town, or state do you reside in?

Q7. What does a welcoming spirit of love look like to a non-traditional person attending church? (non-traditional anything other than a husband and wife and their biological children) ___ Caring & friendly ___ Engaging ___ Pleasant ___ All of the above

Q8. Computer wanted children but did not want to get married. He decided to adopt and recently became the proud father of a little boy. The computer is an example of...
___ Single parenthood ___ Step family ___ Cohabitation ___ Traditional Family

Q9. In What Year Was Same-Sex Marriage Made Legal?

___ 2016 ___ 2010 ___ 2000 ___ 2015

Q10. Hunter and Madeline are not married but have three children and live together. This is an example of ___?

___ Single parenthood

___ a Stepfamily

___ cohabitation

___ a traditional family

Q11. Statistically, what is happening to the traditional family in America?

___ Traditional families are having more children.

- ☐ Men and Women are getting married younger today.
- ☐ There is a decrease in traditional families in America today.
- ☐ There is a rise in traditional families today in America.

Q12. What does LGBTQ mean?

Q13. Do you know anything about 1 Samuel 3:1-19?

Q14. What does the Bible say about Non-Traditional Families?

Q15. What are some examples of non-traditional family structures? How do these structures impact family dynamics? (negative or positive)

Q16. How do different cultures view non-traditional families, and what cultural factors influence these views?

Q17. Do you know any resources for non-traditional families to get help?

Q18. How do your ideas fit into today's thinking about non-traditional families within the church?

APPENDIX D
POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

Post-Project Questionnaire

Having participated in this six-week seminar, how does your answers differ from the pre-project questionnaire that you took when you began the first workshop.

Q7. What does a welcoming spirit of love look like to a non-traditional person attending church? (non-traditional-anything other than a husband and wife and their biological children) ☐ Caring & friendly ☐ Engaging ☐ Pleasant ☐ All of the above

Q8. Computer wanted children but did not want to get married. He decided to adopt and recently became the proud father of a little boy. The computer is an example of...
☐ Single parenthood ☐ Step family ☐ Cohabitation ☐ Traditional Family

Q9. In What Year Was Same-Sex Marriage Made Legal?
☐ 2016 ☐ 2010 ☐ 2000 ☐ 2015

Q10. Hunter and Madeline are not married but have three children and live together. This is an example of__?
☐ Single parenthood
☐ a Stepfamily
☐ cohabitation
☐ a traditional family

Q11. Statistically, what is happening to the traditional family in America?
☐ Traditional families are having more children.
☐ Men and Women are getting married younger today.
☐ There is a decrease in traditional families in America today.
☐ There is a rise in traditional families today in America.

Q12. What does LGBTQ mean?

Q13. Do you know anything about 1 Samuel 3:1-19?

Q14. What does the Bible say about Non-Traditional Families?

Q15. What are some examples of non-traditional family structures? How do these structures impact family dynamics? (negative or positive)

Q16. How do different cultures view non-traditional families, and what cultural factors influence these views?

Q17. Do you know any resources for non-traditional families to get help?

Q18. How do your ideas fit into today's thinking about non-traditional families within the church?

APPENDIX E
GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Group Discussion Questions

Week 1

- Q1. Define non-traditional.
- Q2. How does the topic of non-traditional families relate to your life experience?
- Q3. How does the topic of 21st-century non-traditional families relate to the church?
- Q4. Does the church have an antiquated view of the families today? Are we challenged with ministering to them?

Week 2

- Q1. How does the biblical text of 1 Samuel 3:1-9 speak to communication within the family?
- Q2. Does this biblical text support the voice of God and a greater understanding of God's call to individuals from various family situations?
- Q3. Is God effective at calling us from non-traditional places of life? Why?

Week 3

- Q1. What are your greatest strengths as a non-traditional family?
- Q2. What do you wish others understood about your family?
- Q3. Have you been negatively impacted by your non-traditional family in a positive way or negative way or both by your family system?

Week 4

- Q1. Have you experienced discrimination or judgement due to your non-traditional family structure? If so, how did you handle it?

Q2. What does love within pastoral care in the 21st century and a welcoming environment look like

Week 5

Q1. Describe how the testimony from other leaders who came from non-traditional families affected you?

Q2. In what ways do you think, the concept of family will continue to evolve in the future, particularly regarding non-traditional family models?

Week 6

Q1. What resources are available for non-traditional families?

Q2. Do you feel more comfortable as a result of this training sharing your non-traditional family experience?

Q3. How do factors such as race, socio-economic status, and gender identity intersect with non-traditional family structures?

Q4. As a result of this training do you see yourself and all others as very important to God regardless of their non-traditional family status?

APPENDIX F

DISTORTED LIES: PASTORAL CARE PRESENTATION

DISTORTED LIES: PASTORAL CARE PRESENTATION

Distorted Lies: Pastoral Care in a Bizarro World Presentation Outline & Discussion
Guide Rev. Dr. John O. Page, Doctor of Ministry Cohort Presentation

I. Introduction – Welcome to Bizarro World

A. The Bizarro Metaphor (Superman as an Illustration)

- Bizarro World: A place where truth is falsehood, wisdom is foolishness, and reality is distorted.
- Theological Parallel: Many today reject truth, depth, and theological integrity, choosing emotionalism and misinformation instead.
- Discussion Question: In what ways do you see a “Bizarro” influence in today’s church and culture?

B. The Landscape of Ministry in a Bizarro World

- The impact of anti-intellectualism, postmodernism, and post-pandemic shifts on pastoral leadership.
- The growing challenge of misinformation, digital distractions, and theological superficiality.
- Discussion Question: How has ministry changed since the pandemic in terms of biblical literacy, leadership, and engagement?

II. The Bizarro Contrast: Post-Pandemic vs. Postmodern Ministry

A. Post-Pandemic Ministry: The Search for Stability

- Shift to hybrid worship and reduced in-person engagement.
- Rise in mental health struggles and pastoral fatigue.
- Digital ministry: Blessing or distraction? How TikTok and YouTube shape theology.

B. Postmodern Ministry: The Struggle for Truth

- “Truth” is now subjective and personal rather than biblical.
- Distrust in institutions: Science, government, and even pastoral leadership.
- Faith is personalized, deconstructed, and often disconnected from church tradition.

Discussion Question: What strategies have you used to address postmodern skepticism and theological misinformation?

III. Pastoral Care in a Bizarro World

A. Defining Pastoral Care in the Age of Anti-Intellect

- Working Definition of Pastoral Care:
 - Pastoral care is the compassionate, theological, and intellectual shepherding of individuals and communities toward holistic spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth.
 - It involves guidance, healing, teaching, and discipleship to nurture faith in the midst of uncertainty and cultural confusion.
 - Effective pastoral care in this era requires wisdom, biblical literacy, and critical engagement with misinformation and theological distortions.
- Pull Quotes from Black Theologians on Theological Depth:
 1. Howard Thurman – “Do not be silent; there is no limit to the power that may be released through you.”
 2. James Cone – “Theology is not an intellectual enterprise but a prophetic calling to speak the word of God.”
 3. Katie Cannon – “Even in the face of distortions, we must tell the truth about God, justice, and hope.”
 4. Willie James Jennings – “Theological education must resist cultural captivity and reclaim deep engagement with truth.”

B. Pastoral Care for the Individual

- Spiritual Guidance Amidst Misinformation
 - Teaching discernment in a culture of conspiracy theories and shallow theology.
 - Biblical literacy as a tool for truth and wisdom.
- Mental and Emotional Health
 - Addressing post-pandemic trauma, anxiety, and faith crises.
 - Developing a theology of suffering and resilience.
- Digital Discipleship & Theological Formation
 - Engaging “TikTok Theologians” and “YouTube Prophets” with critical thinking.
 - Creating safe spaces for questioning without abandoning faith.

C. Pastoral Care for the Pastor

- Intellectual Integrity in Leadership
 - Balancing academic rigor and pastoral accessibility.
 - How to preach deep truth without alienating congregations.
- Self-Care & Avoiding Burnout
 - The burden of pastoral exhaustion and high expectations.
 - The need for peer support, theological enrichment, and personal renewal.

Discussion Question: How do you maintain your theological integrity and self-care while leading in an anti-intellectual culture?

IV. The Way Forward – Reclaiming Pastoral Leadership

A. Reclaiming the Intellectual Church

- Preaching and teaching must engage both heart and mind.
- Encouraging Christian critical thinking as a spiritual discipline.

B. Discipleship in an Age of Misinformation

- Moving beyond surface-level faith into deeper biblical study.
- Addressing deconstruction with both compassion and depth.

C. Sustaining the Caregiver

- Establishing rhythms of rest, study, and authentic ministry relationships.
- Learning to navigate skepticism while staying faithful to biblical teaching.

Discussion Question: What is one tangible step you can take to reclaim depth and truth in your ministry?

V. Conclusion – A Call to Action

- Summary of Key Points:
 - We live in a Bizarro World where truth is distorted, requiring pastors to be both shepherds and intellectual guides.
 - The post-pandemic and postmodern landscape present challenges that demand resilience, theological depth, and mental wellness.
 - Pastoral care must address misinformation, spiritual formation, and mental well-being in an era of distrust and digital influence.
 - Ministers must also care for themselves, maintaining theological integrity and avoiding burnout.

- The way forward involves reclaiming intellectual engagement, deep discipleship, and sustainable pastoral leadership.
- Final Challenge: How do you, as Doctor of Ministry students, navigate and pastor in a world where truth is distorted?
- Encouragement to be both shepherds and intellectual guides in ministry.
- Q&A / Open Discussion

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APPENDIX G
SIX-WEEK CURRICULUM

Six Week Curriculum

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Activities</i>
Week 1	Introductions - Discuss Foundation Papers and begin Biblical Exposition
Week 2	Continuation of Exposition on Bible Lesson 1 Samuel 3:1-19
Week 3	Clinical Psychologist and Social Worker Presentation – Family Systems Rev. Dottie Smith, LICSW. Boston College, MSW
Week 4	Pastoral Care Session to Families in the Church – Rev. Dr. John O. Page, Pastor of Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Hackensack, NJ. MDiv & DMin.
Week 5	Testimonials from Non-traditional Christians Leaders who will Share their experiences (lay leadership)
Week 6	Evangelism Presentation Guest Speaker (non-traditional families) Rev. Dr. Mark Arnold, Prof. @ Gordon Conwell, Morning Star Baptist Church
Week 6	Collect and Compile all Quantitative Data from sessions, Synthesize findings and draft a comprehensive summary for the project paper. Discuss with professional associates. Collect and compile all Quantitative Data from sessions. Synthesize findings and draft a comprehensive summary for the project paper. Discuss with professional associates how the project was fruitful and meaningful.

Detailed Outline of the 6-Week Project & Foundation Papers for Participants

Caring for the non-traditional family is crucial to the church's ministry. To demonstrate Christ's affection and generate a welcoming, favorable, and accepting community where all families can discover backing and reassurance in their spiritual relationships, the church should offer support, care, and spiritual development for these families.

Non-traditional families can face challenges such as societal judgment, legal issues, and feelings of isolation.

Biblical Foundations (excerpts)

The church may give children from unconventional families more significant nurture by considering their particular needs. 1 Samuel 3:1-19 sheds some light on pastoral care to non-traditional families by demonstrating how God used the priest Eli who is given the task to take Hannah's son Samuel and mentor him in the Temple. A critical understanding of this passage helps Christians and churches to understand the concept of family in modern society, which could help in embracing non-traditional families to serve them more effectively in the church and the community.

Historical Foundations (excerpts)

The landscapes, compositions, and dynamics of families have changed in recent years. For instance, the social, economic, and political forces that shaped perceptions of family and the lived realities themselves as restructured expectations and traditions have shifted. Such modern challenges in spiritual care will not be adequately addressed unless this is traced back to historic moments when families were turning from traditional patterns into diversity. Four million African Americans left the US South over three decades between 1940 and 1970 in what came to be known as the Great Migration after fleeing from Jim Crow, which severely restricted their rights to move with freedom socially, politically, or economically. “They settle in urban areas where racial hierarchies were less pronounced.”¹ The mighty impacts of slavery and the Great Migration should serve as ratings for an expedition in history, analyzing how these two have influenced society over generations.

Theological Foundations (excerpts)

Pastoral care is a subset of Practical Theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher is credited with establishing practical theology as a discipline of theological studies. He felt practical theology should be grounded on a larger understanding of Christianity in contemporary society. “Practical theology seamlessly integrates faith with the practical realities encountered in ministry contexts. Practical Theology is a bridge between theory and practice. Practical Theology is one of the fields that draw upon the concerns and

¹ Ellora Derenoncourt, “Can you move to opportunity? Evidence from the Great Migration,” *American Economic Review* 112, no. 2 (2022): 369-370.

resources of others.”² “The term pastoral care comes from the Latin *pastorem*, meaning shepherd, and includes in its deep etymology the notion of tending to the needs of the vulnerable.

Interdisciplinary Foundations (excerpts)

A holistic approach is needed to manage the variety of problems experienced by the church in its services to families of different types. An interdisciplinary approach allows for the application of various knowledge, diverse perspectives, and multiple methodologies across different fields to solve complex issues.³ Therefore, a section of the project focused on how “Family Systems Theory” would enhance our understanding of pastoral care for non-traditional families.⁴ This project’s aim was to look at how Family Systems Theory can relate to the church’s view of family in the present day to determine a more caring and constructive way of providing pastoral care. Recognizing interconnectedness and addressing systemic issues facilitates healthier relationships and fosters holistic growth within families. Most churches, including this church context, are made up of families. By applying the Family System Theory, we can peek into communication styles, family dynamics, and interpersonal interactions within a family. The theory emphasizes that all family members are seen as a system of variously tied individuals who can only be explained by understanding how they behave through their

² David Willows and John Swinton, *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care: Practical Theology in a Multidisciplinary Context* (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000), 28.

³ Steph Menken and Machiel Kestra, “An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Research: Theory and Practice,” *An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Research*, ed. Machiel Kestra and Jelle Zandveld (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 66.

⁴ Judy Haefner, “An Application of Bowen Family Systems Theory,” *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 35, no. 11 (2014): 835-841.

interconnected behaviors and emotions.⁵ “The theory includes eight concepts that have a logical progression that builds on the family as an emotional unit; they are: 1) Nuclear Family Emotional System, 2) The Differentiation of Self, 3) Triangles, 4) Cutoff, 5) Family Projection Process, 6) Multi-generational Transmission Process, 7) Sibling Position, and 8) Societal Emotional Process.”⁶

The theory suggests that in observing the overall functioning of a family, family members are influenced with each one helping to stabilize or disorganize the system.

⁵ Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory* (Lake Frederick, VA: Leading Systems Press), 5-6.

⁶ Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*, 3.

APPENDIX H

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES

Social Work Practices

2/28/2025

A Response Three categories of Social Work practice & Pastoral Care

First: Micro-Level Practice:

This level addresses individual and small group interactions, such as counseling, therapy, and direct support services. Social workers at this level work closely with clients to assess needs, provide resources, and facilitate personal change.

Relation to Pastoral Care: Pastoral care often operates at a micro level as well, providing one-on-one support, counseling, and spiritual guidance, prayer, scripture support to individuals. Building trust, fellowship and community Koinonia.

1



Second: Mezzo-Level Practice

Involves working with groups, families, and communities. This may include facilitating support groups, community organizing, and family therapy. The goal is to enhance group dynamics and foster community connections.

Relation to Pastoral Care: Pastoral care can encompass mezzo-level activities such as leading small groups, organizing community outreach programs. The aim to strengthen relationships between the community and the church.

2

2/28/2025



Third: Macro-level practice

Involves systemic change, policy advocacy, and community development. Social workers at this level address societal issues and work towards improving social conditions through legislation and broader initiatives.

Relation to Pastoral Care: While pastoral care is primarily focused on individual and community needs, many churches engage in macro-level efforts through social justice initiatives, advocacy, and community service programs. Pastors may also speak to broader societal issues from a moral or ethical standpoint. The urban church particularly the Black church and Pastors have historically been very active in this area

3

Scripture: 1 John 4:7 - "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God."

2Corinthians 1-4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort which we ourselves are comforted by God.

1 Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. (ESV)

4

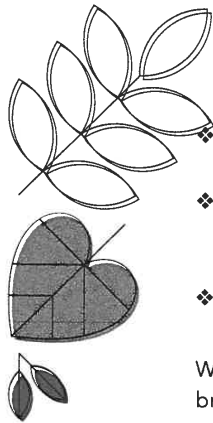
2/28/2025

Trust the work of the Spirit through the power of the gospel.

- Ø Through the gospel, the Spirit convicts and brings about genuine conversion.
- Ø Through the gospel, the Spirit makes obedience a joy.
- Ø Through the gospel, the Spirit frees our hearts for service & love.
- Ø Through the gospel, the Spirit enables us to stand without fear when the world jeers at our beliefs.
- Ø Through the gospel, the Spirit matures and sanctifies us so our reasons for gathering with God's people increasingly align with his.

The more our communities give off the fragrance of Jesus, the more it'll make sense for someone to say, "I want to go to church."

5

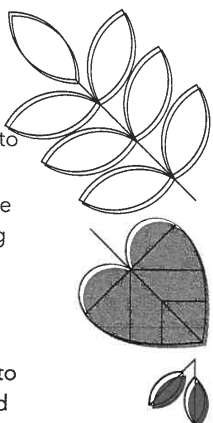


❖ The church of the 21st century needs to be armed with compassion,

❖ be knowledge and informed about the needs and challenges of the changing congregation,

❖ enveloped in grace

We have an unprecedented opportunity to bring hope and healing to a broken world grappling with multiple challenges.



6

Biblical Guidance for Pastoral Care

Love and Compassion:

Scripture: 1 John 4:7 - "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God."

Principle: Pastoral care should be grounded in genuine love and compassion, reflecting God's love for humanity.

Listening and Presence:

Scripture: James 1:19 - "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

Principle: Effective pastoral care involves active listening and being present with individuals, allowing them to share their struggles and experiences in a safe non judgmental atmosphere

Spiritual Guidance and Discernment:

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6 - "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

Principle: Provide spiritual guidance, encouraging individuals to seek God's direction and wisdom in their lives. Teach how to use the bible

Community and Fellowship:

Scripture: Hebrews 10:24-25 - "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together."

Principle: Foster a sense of community, encouraging individuals to connect and support one another in their faith journeys.

Healing and Restoration:

Scripture: Psalm 147:3 - "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

Principle: Loving care & concern that aims to bring healing and restoration to individuals emotionally, spiritually, and relationally.

Prayer & Support:

James 5:14 Call on the elders of the church to pray for the sick and for healing

Holistic Well-Being:

Scripture: 3 John 1:2 - "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well."

4 3 2 1

Principle: Pastoral care addresses the whole person—spiritual, emotional, physical, and social—recognizing that all aspects of life are interconnected.

These principles serve as a guide that emphasizes a comprehensive approach to supporting individuals and communities in their spiritual and holistic well-being.

APPENDIX I
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Demographic Questions

Q1. What type of family structure are you a part of now as an adult? Please circle if listed or explain.

A) Traditional (husband and wife and their biological children); B) Cohabitation; C) Same-Sex Family; D) LGBTQ; E) Step-Parent Home; F) Foster Care; G) Adoptee H) Divorced; I) Other Explain _____

Q2. What type of family structure were you raised in as a child and teenager? Please explain _____

Q3. What is your Date of Birth?

Q4. Gender type M or F or other, specify?

Q5. What ethnicity are you? African-American, White, Asian, Latino, etc....

Q6. What city, town, or state do you reside in?

APPENDIX J

FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTION

Final Interview Questions

Q1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a non-traditional family member?

Q2. What cultural and spiritual practices are important to your family?

Q3. As a result of this symposium, why do you believe we must extend love and care to non-traditional family members?

APPENDIX K

EVANGELISM PRESENTATION “GO”

Evangelism Presentation “Go”

“Go”: Evangelism in the 21st-Century Context and Families Today

Examination of evangelism in a post-pandemic world

I. Presentation Structure

Modal Structure:

- Textual Foundations
- Theological Musings
- The Path Forward (Praxis)

II. Textual Foundations

Re-examining Matthew 28:16-20

- Emphasis on the Greek word διστάζω (“some doubted”)
- The focus is not on “Go,” but on “make disciples” (μαθητεύσατε)
- “Go” (πορευθέντες) functions as a modifying participle
- Key Themes from the Text:
 - Disciples in Tension
 - Direct encounter with the risen Christ
 - Mixed responses: worship and doubt
 - Human struggle with extraordinary experiences
 - Jesus’ Authority
 - “All authority . . . has been given to me” (Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία)
 - Abiding Presence
 - “I am with you” (ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι)

III. Theological Musings

Disciple-Forming Activities

- Baptism (βαπτίζοντες)
- Teaching (διδάσκοντες)
- Community formation
- Worship and prayer
- Discipleship groups

IV. The Path Forward: Praxis

Existential Threats to Evangelism

- Social-political repression
- Information overload and misinformation

- Institutional malaise vs. movement mentality
- Changing demographics
- Community Engagement (Beyond Church Walls)
- Childcare and parenting support
- Community meals and food banks
- Life-skills workshops
- Youth programs
- Senior outreach
- Community partnerships
- Grounding Evangelism in Discipleship
- Discipleship as a family practice
- Redefining evangelism as invitation
- Relationship-building with non-believers
- Living as authentic witnesses
- Holistic integration of evangelism
- Addressing Doubt with Empathy
- Validate doubt and foster open dialogue
- Equip families with relevant resources
- Cultivate empathetic listening
- Embrace diverse perspectives
- Multi-Generational Ministry
- Intergenerational worship and learning
- Cross-generational mentoring and events
- Inclusive communication strategies
- Generational awareness and program design
- Balancing Faith with Modern Realities
- Address mental health needs
- Embrace digital platforms for worship and connection
- Foster strong relational connections
- Offer flexible, hybrid worship formats
- Expand inclusive outreach efforts

V. Conclusion

“Go” Revisited

- Not just movement, but mission: Make disciples through baptism and teaching
- Jesus’ authority meets the disciples’ doubt
- Evangelism today must adapt with authenticity and resilience
- The Great Commission calls for active disciple-making rooted in Jesus’ enduring presence.

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